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THE
Ground of Hope :
OR,
SELF-EXAMINATION THE CHRISTIAN'S
SAFEGUARD.

BY THE
REV. J. C. BOYCE, B.A.
CURATE OF TOPCLIFFE, YORKSHIRE.

"Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove
your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that
Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates."

2 Cor. xiii. 5.

SEELEY, JACKSON, AND HALLIDAY, 54 FLEET STREET.
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P R E F A C E.

THIS little work originated in a desire to set forth, in an earnest and forcible manner, a duty much inculcated from the pulpit, but one which, it is to be feared, is very much neglected. They who have the cure of souls know, to their great discouragement, how low and flickering too often is the flame of piety within the hearts of the majority of their people. Too often it has grieved them to see, that, notwithstanding earnest labours in the cause of Christ, the religion of many committed to their pastoral charge is mere lifeless, unloving, fitful sentimentality. And, although painfully conscious of many haltings and stumblings in their own walk by faith,

it has yet been the desire of their hearts to be human means, in the hand of God, of remedying these defects, so as to fan, if it might be, the smouldering fire into a quicker, warmer, glow.

To such, and to all sincere Christians "looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the Day of God," the author dedicates his book, conscious of its many imperfections, but praying that his humble labours may be blessed to the eternal good of some, at least, among its readers. He offers them reflections which have served, as he has penned them, to exhibit, in a strong light, his own short-comings, and, therefore, regards the period spent in preparing them for the press as one full of edification, and to be looked back to with gratitude. He is hopeful, then, that, among those with whom he is desirous of holding close and peaceful fellowship in the Church, both Militant and Triumphant, he may meet with some to whom the perusal of the following pages shall not have been unprofitable; and

that thus, as well beyond as within the sphere of his more immediate influence for good, he may have been an honoured instrument of promoting deeper insight into self, truer penitence, warmer love for God, more deadness to the world, and brighter hopes of heaven.

March, 1859.



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SELF-EXAMINATION.

SECTION I.



SELF-EXAMINATION.



CHAPTER I.

NATURE AND NEED OF SELF-EXAMINATION.

OF all modes of eliciting knowledge in use among men, that which proceeds through the medium of Question and Answer appears, from its conciseness and its concentration upon any subject in hand, to be one of the most valuable. Without its aid, we can well imagine it would be most difficult to dispense evenly-balanced justice in the courts of law, or to proceed to clear and lucid conclusions upon

cases which so often demand enquiry in the social and domestic circles. The judge, the pleader, or the arbiter, gain by it such clue to the full knowledge of the case before them, in its several bearings, to the exclusion of all information foreign to the point, as guards them from forming an erroneous judgment, and from pronouncing a premature decision.

This is the case in matters of temporal moment, in which the Questioner and the Questioned are two distinct persons. But the believer, in earnest to make his peace with God, and to render his "calling and election sure," is under the strongest moral obligation to come daily before the Tribunal of Conscience, and to give an account of himself after the same process; but with this difference—that the arbiter there is "the small, still voice" of his Creator, and that Questioner and Questioned are one and the same. One man closely examines another, that he may thereby put himself, in the surest and best

way, in possession of the *very isolated* facts which he desires to know, whatsoever may be their nature. The Christian closely examines *himself*—and that with precision and concentrativeness—that he may feel satisfied as to his true position daily, with reference to Eternity. Negligence, in this great duty, will weaken the calm trustfulness of his hope in God, just as the mariner cannot be supposed to know whether he is far from, or near to, the desired haven, unless he consult his compass, and look for familiar way-marks during his voyage.

Self-examination would not be needed were man a being of perfect holiness. It proceeds upon the ground that he is a fallen creature. We cannot conceive of the Almighty One examining Himself as to His own spotless attributes; or of an angel of light, a being kept from falling, checking himself in his hallowed round of ministering offices and celestial praises, to ask if he were fit for his

employments. Self-examination opposes a barrier for the time to our wonted activities ; and in heaven there are no such hindrances. Heaven's work continues in a course that never varies. It has, as it were, the ceaseless flow of the river. There, "they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come!"*

This process implies also an act of self-denial. No man desires to be alone with his own sins. The soul obeys an instinct naturally implanted within it, and shrinks from such association. Men of the most opposite characters are in this respect the same. In the case of the wilful sinner, such self-scrutiny would arouse him from the sleep of pleasure to the most acute fears as to his future state. And while he would yet a little longer indulge in the one, and remain oblivious of all danger with

* Rev. iv. 8.

regard to the other, he will ever turn away from the court of self-enquiry.

But the anxious Christian has no less aversion to hold communion with his past life. He seeks to walk as one ever looking up steadfastly into heaven: he thirsts to feel ever within him the thrill of Divine love: he would ever have his best affections, hopes, desires, revolving round Almighty God as their great Sun and Centre: he would be ever soaring above the earth; and it is irksome to him—it is apt to cast gloom over his spirit, and to paralyse his energies—when he approaches those enquiries which, he knows, cannot but reveal to him the depth of earthliness, which yet encrusts and weighs down his heart. Fain would he “have the wings of a dove, that he might flee away and be at rest;”—bending ever before the throne as sinless as “the burning row” of cherubim and seraphim he beholds visioned there. The higher he rises towards Christian perfection, the more irksome must he ever

feel the duty we are considering. No sooner does he begin to mount upward, and to breathe free and pure air, and to throw open his whole soul to the empire of holy thoughts, and longings, and to enjoy a foretaste, as it were, of the joy of the spirit redeemed forevermore from the annoying and depressing influences of sin and Satan, than a tender conscience sends forth its memories, to demand his presence before its tribunal; and again he has to cry out with the Apostle, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

And yet, he can never know all the depths of his obligation to the voice of the Most High within him, till he shall have been rescued from all earthly weariness and strife. Only One of man's nature ever was free from sin. Not even He experienced full release from the acute mental sufferings it creates. For, bowed down to the earth by the weight of transgressions not His own, He cried, "My

soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death!" and on the very eve of expiating our offences, "My God, my God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?" And the Christian may learn from this, that though he may often feel the glow of his fervent aspirations to Godward grow cool, and, ~~after~~ devout and sweet meditation, may be sensible that a strange deadness and apathy to Divine and Eternal truths is creeping over him, he needs not to despair. It cannot be that he should have rest in this life. Sin and Satan have power to afflict and to tire, though they cannot make him their eternal captive. And he ought to know that the more eagerly he strives to live as a citizen of the New Jerusalem, absent from his home, the more intensely is he likely to suffer from the effects of evil opposition. If Satan followed the perfectly sinless Redeemer to His dying agonies, and summoned together all his forces that he might embitter those last hours, by causing Him to feel the most fearful of all sin's penalties—the hiding

of His holy Father's countenance in displeasure,—it is not to be expected that he will relax in his efforts to annoy, even if, because baffled by his Almighty vanquisher, he cannot subdue the very holiest of men. Sin lurks within our members, although it may not reign there. “Our strong sins may every day grow weaker, and our weak graces stronger; but grace shall not be perfected, nor sin destroyed, whilst we are in the body.”

Satan is a wily plotter. If he meets the Christian in the Court of Conscience, he will take care to draw the covering of a cloud over heaven's bright light, and to prevent it from streaming into the soul, as far as he can, by bringing up sin, in its darkest possible form, and overwhelming the conscious soul with taunts, and the mockery of his formerly high hopes. And if he finds a Christian professor dreaming about heaven, and feeding his spirit upon idle rhapsodies, to the neglect of the stern conflicts and duties of the believer's warfare, it will be his

aim, then, to keep the duty of self-examination out of sight. He has a hopeful prospect of final victory over one so blinded. He will leave his expected victim to dream on in his false excitement and enthusiasm. He will cause him to think of life, not as of a period of warfare against evil, but as of a time for dreaming about eternal realities. And while the professor continues to keep so close to thoughts and words, in lieu of actions, he will try to lighten the weight of the cross upon his shoulders, by encouraging self-righteous thoughts in the seasons of perplexity and trouble. His colourings of vices make them look so much like virtues that the delusion meets with success too fearful to think of.

Be on your guard, then, reader, as to these things. Keep ever in view the subtlety of the Evil One, whose one object it is — an object in the furtherance of which his energies are sleepless — to effect the eternal ruin of your soul. You will meet this adversary face to face

everywhere; but, without doubt, the ground on which he is least likely to hurt you is that dedicated to prayer and self-examination. We shall learn, in the course of these pages the intimate connexion subsisting between these two duties. The latter, faithfully and regularly performed, will be a sure test as to the state of the spiritual life. You will be able to ascertain from it whether its pulses have an equable and healthy play, or whether it labours under the opposite extremes of mere excitement's fever-heat and apathetic languor. The object of this chapter is to induce you to form a habit of entering into yourself; of searching into the workings of the heart with closed doors; of endeavouring to review, as far as you can, the thoughts, desires, and motives, that have kept the heart, the mind, and the will, in constant activity, during a certain definite period of past time. As a conscious and rational being, able to know the difference between right and wrong, you ought to be able to do this; and as a

responsible being, it is imperatively necessary that the advice herein suggested should be taken. The following two considerations may serve to shew the *need* of your conducting this process.

It is commanded in God's Holy Word.—This is the direct medium of conveying the Almighty Creator's injunctions to each individual who reads its inspired pages. And surely the Creator's mandate involves the need of the creature's immediate, strict, and unquestioning obedience. Remember, then, I beseech you earnestly, that the Bible is no mere ordinary book, full of printed matter, which you are at liberty to read, criticise, or lay aside at pleasure. It differs from all books in this, among other respects — that it lays a positive and solemn obligation upon you to carry its dictates into practice. It will be a witness against you of the most formidable kind if you heed not this. Read it as you would listen to the living voice of God, that it may not, as a living voice, con-

demn you at the last. Your Bible offers to be your closet friend. It will help you to receive edification, comfort, and sweet presences of God *there*. It offers, moreover, to guide you in every perplexity, under the pressure of every ill. Esteem it as the best of books; consult it as you would a letter written to you personally by Almighty God, full of wise directions for the safe guidance of the soul heavenward. So you shall not waver or faint as you touch the brink of the cold river. But if you read God's Word superficially — if you only try to perform the easier duties it suggests to you, to the neglect of those requiring more self-denial, and time, and thought, you may find your last hours proportionately gloomy.

But self-examination is *indispensable to the attainment of self-knowledge*. The heart of man is not to be trusted: it is deceitful. No mere passing moods of content or happiness, no temporary freedom from rebukes of conscience, ought to lead us to feel we are safe. If in

temporal matters, we employ one without whose assistance we are unable to transact business at all, but who, however useful he may be in other respects, is addicted to the sin of speaking what is not true, we are naturally upon our guard against that man; we take all pains to test his veracity the more, from the knowledge that so much must be left in his hands. And it is so with the heart; we have been warned respecting its evil nature—we have been told by the Holy Spirit Himself, that “Every imagination of the thoughts of the heart is *only* evil continually.” Its recesses are at all times accessible to Satan and his agents of ruin; and yet out of that heart are the issues either of life or of death; it is inseparable from us—it is the very spring of life’s activities. Can you, then, as a believer, anxious for the soul’s salvation, listen to, and be led by all its dictates indiscriminately? No; its proceedings must be tested; its dark and secret workings must be brought to the light of the Bible; its counsels must be well examined. Neglect this, and

it will act upon you as an opiate in spiritual things; it will lead you along blindfolded to eternal destruction; it will whisper "Peace, peace! when there is no peace." It has depths which only the plummet-line of self-examination can fathom; dissimulations and pretences, which only the same powerful instrument for good, directed by the wisdom of God, can unmask.

No longer delay, then, to hold communion with your past hours. "Commune with your heart upon your bed, and be still." Yes, "be still;" the work cannot be carried on while companions, daily cares, worldly duties, occupy your thoughts. It requires a closet; and every man *has* a closet for this very purpose—a *skeleton-closet*. The way into it is through the bended knees, or through meditation before sleep seizes you upon the pillow. Struggle against the inroads of sleep, until the solemn investigation has been made, with the supplicated help, and under the All-seeing Eye of the Searcher of all hearts!

CHAPTER II.

CONSCIENCE, ITS NATURE, PURPOSE AND FACULTIES.

Of the creations of Almighty God, all wonderful past the power of thought to conceive of, not the least wonderful are those invisible influences to which we often find it hard to affix a definite locality or name. These works appear not only to take up that position, evident to human senses, which the Creator has assigned to each in His oeconomy of nature, but their purposes are two-fold. They appear to have been framed in such a way as to command man's notice as a being of two-fold nature. They have meanings which we at

once take in by the aid of the ear or the eye, and they are each furnished with yet deeper meanings, which are intended to allure and to edify the soul.

The Creator has adapted all things to the needs and cravings of His noble creature, man. He veils Himself in impenetrable mystery; but in infinite condescension to the lowness and the weakness of our faith, which alone He has given us as the means of apprehending Him, He has written a language beneath the surface of outward objects, that helps to set the unquiet heart of the thinker at rest, and to keep his mind from wandering into strange paths in its search after truth. That we may know and feel convinced that our puny powers of vision, cannot fathom the depths of His infinite Wisdom,—that we may be sensible that His skill is lavished forth in regions far higher than the universe as seen by us, and upon objects hidden from the knowledge even of the most intelligent in

the present system of things,—He takes our faculties for His pupils, and so speaks to them, either singly or combined together, as that, although they cannot understand the lesson in all its depth and fulness, they should yet feel themselves addressed by Him Whose “Ways are not as our ways, nor His Thoughts as our thoughts.” You will observe, that even of outer and more palpable objects in the creations around or above us, some communicate to us their existence through all the senses, others through only one. We *see* and we *hear* when the clouds drop down the dew; we feel, too, the freshness of the fertilizing shower, we revive frequently under its cool *touch* upon ourselves; we inhale the *fragrance* of grateful herbs and flowers. We cannot *see* the wind; but God has furnished us with other tangible proofs of its existence, although here the faculty of sight is useless. Take the great fact of the earth’s annual and diurnal rotations. Which of the senses enables us to perceive it?

Pure mental research *alone* discovered this great truth. And yet we need not the evidence of our senses to teach us that it is a truth. The brain receives impressions of its being so through other than external organs.

And this brings me to draw an argument from analogy with respect to the indwelling within us of conscience—as a living, acting power—a power invisible, but still impressible. That we have it within our wonderful framework, is as clear as that we have external and visible limbs. As, then, the Divine Contriver and Architect of all worlds and systems, visible and invisible, makes known to us different truths in different ways, so, by attentively contemplating, by digging below the surface of these differences, we may find helps to the more faithful apprehension of the grander truths connected with God's existence, and government over us here,—and in a future state of being, of which we learn from revelation alone. And we ought to find no difficulty in

acknowledging, that God is ever present with us,—that He sees and knows our most secret thoughts,—that He rewards virtue, and punishes vice,—that He will save the righteous and condemn the guilty,—and that happiness or misery are, to a very great extent, in our own power,—when we are brought so perpetually face to face with that hidden power within us, from whose scrutiny not a word, a thought, a look, a desire, an action can escape; which controls, or would control, all these with a regal sway; which even in the most guilty breast is enlisted ever on the side of good, till its judgments are warped and overborne by evil; which mysteriously deals out to us pleasure or pain, happiness or remorse, consequent upon our pursuit of that which meets either with its approval or with its displeasure.

“The Judgment Seat of Christ!” Probably few readers of these pages have not striven to realize a foreshadowing of that dread object. Many imaginations, in seasons of solitude and

silence, may have sought to look upon the spectacle, and the proceedings associated with it, as upon a scene of life passing before the human vision : but few perhaps, comparatively speaking, of the many have thought at such a time, how useful a helper, in this study, they have within their own breasts. There is an active scrutiny ever going on within us than which no fuller type of the Last Great Assize can be conceived of. It might be, that one individual could not with equally graphic success, trace out, in the mysterious court of conscience, images of the Great White Throne, the opened books, the summoned dead small and great, the millions upon millions of attendant angels, the archangel's trumpet-call, the voices of acquittal and condemnation, the unearthly horrors of the scene. And yet I am disposed to think that God has not left us without strong testimony to the truth of the things that are coming upon the earth in the last great day. Were it only possible

for one awakened sinner to have keen discernment of the heart-secrets of another, the combination of experiences, thence accruing, would probably convey a strongly-marked outline of the solemn scene in its entirety.

Men do not enter into sin with the same avidity: some do not sink into its gulf so deeply as others. In some, the voice of an accusing conscience is startling, from its sudden activity; in others it is low, but prolonged. Its terrors vary in degree, and in power. It may be, indeed, that this book may be read by one who has committed some crime of deeper dye, which God in His Mercy has since pardoned. Let him remember for a moment, if he can, the commotion within his heart, when he was roused to a keen sense of his then fearful position. I am taking the case of a conscience whose power has not been weakened by repeated moral deafness and opposition to good. When placed face to face, as it were, with the unseen but living Judge within him, did he

not feel, for the time, as some hopeless and helpless criminal, conscious of no one bright phase in the sin committed, to relieve its dark nature? Did he not then see the sin which perhaps, before it had seduced him into its meshes, looked radiant and delightful, standing as a malicious but truthful accuser at his right hand, regarding him with keen, triumphant hate, and mocking the culprit's yearning hopes of pardon? Behold here a type of Satan, the "accuser of the brethren," seeking to claim his own amid the convulsions of that awful Day.

Were not the rebukes he met with in that season of remorse, thundered forth with awful vividness, even as though they had conveyed themselves to him through real voice and speech? And though his bodily vision discerned no form, did not his excited imagination depict one, clothed in robes of relentless justice; and did he not quail before that spectral image of the real? Behold here a type of

Him, Who hereafter shall sit upon the Throne, borne down to earth upon its basement of clouds,—before Whose Coming “all faces shall gather blackness,” “and the heavens and the earth shall flee away,”—and Who to each one of us shall say, either “Come ye blessed,” or “Depart ye cursed”? In seasons of real or apprehended danger, or when stung with more than usual violence by convictions of sin, and trembling for the soul’s safety, or when betrayed into despondency as to our apparently ineffectual struggles against evil and the evil one, have not very many of us turned back and looked most gloomily into the past, and beheld troops upon troops of sins committed every year of our lives, rushing upon us as though, like waves of the sea, they would go over our heads? Behold here, in the resuscitated memories of those transgressions whose number we cannot count, it being legion, but whose nature we distinguish only too plainly, a type of the resurrection of the dead, sum-

moned to their great account. It is true indeed, that the court of Conscience only mistily and indistinctly shadows forth the last judgment of quick and dead ; and this is all that could be expected of it. All on earth is imperfect—joy as well as sorrow, happiness as well as misery. The full bliss of the faithful, the full terrors of the lost, are reserved for eternity :—they are to be among the manifestations of the last great day.

Surely the fact that we have each one within us this unmistakeable type of that great scrutiny through which all flesh must pass at the end of the world, is enough to quicken our zeal, to give wings to our desires to learn of this silent witness for the truth of God's purposes towards us hereafter, all lessons it has the power of conveying to us. Let us, then, seek to know more of Conscience—to make more intimate acquaintance with its nature, purpose, and faculties—looking upon it as a guide and a safeguard against coming evil, as a

most solemn Mentor, who gives, as it were, more audible voice to the utterances of the Bible;—or rather, as a preacher living within us, whose care for our eternal welfare is naturally as untiring as its wise provisions of wisdom for our right conduct are valuable, past the power of words to tell. Let us try so to live in a world of excitement, and hurry, and absorbing care, as that, when Conscience only whispers, we may leave everything, and go to learn its will, even as obedient children quit their play at the sound of their parents' summons. For the things of time, however important they may appear to us now, are but as idle toys, and we can well afford to throw away baubles and shadows, that we may be taught by our wise inward monitor how to attain to unfading riches and solid substance.

Two remarkably graphic passages in the Book of Proverbs will serve well for a sort of ground-work to our enquiry into Conscience. "As in water, face answereth to face, so the

heart of man to man.”* And again, “The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly.”† Conscience, here, is spoken of as a light enlightening a dark place, so as to enable us to see what it contains. It is a piercing, searching light, leaving no corner unvisited, “quick and powerful, a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” “What man knoweth the thoughts of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?” This light, then, guides our way into secret recesses securely closed against our neighbour’s power of insight, which, indeed, are “naked and open” only to the Eye of God besides our own.

The notion of light, active and powerful to pierce into all places within its reach, is one well calculated to teach us the *nature* of conscience. Nothing can be hidden from it. But, as we proceed with our enquiry, we shall find that it is

* Proverbs xxvii. 19. † Proverbs xx. 27.

far more than that power which merely converts darkness into light. It is not merely as the material sun, chasing away darkness from the universe. Imagine that sun to have powers of consciousness, an acute sense of right and wrong, sympathies entirely enlisted on the side of virtue, judicial authority to repress vice, and you have before you the image of the human conscience. Were that sun able to read the workings of the heart, as well as to note all words men speak, all actions men perform beneath its rays, the wicked, intent upon sin, would "wait for twilight," until their unwelcome observer should have departed to another hemisphere.

But here there would be but little analogy between Conscience and the sun gifted with these imaginary powers. Conscience can scarcely be said to sleep, if we will allow it its full and legitimate exercise. It utters its remonstrances, it pronounces its verdicts, not alone in our waking hours, but in the

night-watches, in our dreams. The heart's natural tendencies are wont to give shape and character to those "visions of the head upon our bed," and we can understand, that, wheresoever the heart is active, whether by night or by day, whether asleep or awake, Conscience follows on, and observes its motions. It is no common lamp:—it is that "of The Lord." It conveys to us, in its subtle and peculiarly impressive language, His dictates, and betokens His Perpetual Presence, Who neither slumbers nor sleeps. It is the very Voice of the Most High and Holy One—His very Presence within us. And so "It is about our path, and about our bed, and spieth out all our ways."

The Holy Spirit Himself bears testimony to this judicial severity and majesty of the Conscience. "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God."* Such

* 1 John iii. 20, 21.

is the declaration of an inspired Apostle—a declaration allowing this witness within us to be subordinate to its Great Designer, but giving to its decisions respecting our conduct terrible force and authority—leading us to infer that its sentences of condemnation or its verdicts of acquittal are ratified in heaven. It cannot be denied, but that this general statement admits of particular modifications. The heart's evasive, subtle nature, will often lead us to mistake the language of the conscience. And there are periods of physical and mental disorder, which may occur more frequently than we imagine, that may lead us occasionally to put too stern a construction upon the voices of God's witness. But it behoves us to institute a strict scrutiny into ourselves, before we determine that we may safely turn aside from its dictates. If the surface of the water be ruffled, there will be reflected from it a distorted image of the man; but, if the liquid be calm and clear, the image is an exact representation and


counterpart of the real. And so, where no disturbing causes operate, such as have been just referred to, "the heart of man answereth to man" with truth and exactness, in the process of self-examination. Hence its value to the man anxious to be at peace with God.

The beneficial effects resulting to us from direct obedience to the dictates of conscience, bring with them to our breasts the comforting assurance that "God is Love." No less do their judicious severity, godly precepts, and continued watchfulness, evidence this, than the same features in the conduct of the Christian parent evidence his thoughtful and anxious care for his offspring. To "withhold man from his purpose" when bent upon any evil pursuit,—to watch carefully over the good seed sown in his corrupt heart, that it ripen safely into heavenly-mindedness,—to "order our goings" through this probationary state, "that our footsteps slip not," to speak peace to us, and give us glowing

foretastes of eternal joys when we have done well, and to inspire us with wholesome fear when we have wandered astray from God,—this is the mission of Conscience. And it is gifted with all the most precious faculties of a wise and a dear friend to aid it in effecting these purposes. In this respect, especially, it is most invaluable—it is a friend to whose safe keeping we can entrust the sin, mourned over and repented of, which we dare not mention to the nearest or the dearest relatives or advisers. There are secrets of spiritual joy, and dark secrets of wilful sin, once dominant, but since by Grace subdued, which the believer feels averse to communicate to others, lest the sweetness of the one should desert him, or the heinousness of the other render him an object of avoidance to those in whose companionship he most delights. But God and the Conscience know these things, and further our happiness by their jealous guardianship of them.

To the penitent, Conscience is *a gentle remembrancer of guilt*. It conveys to them the message of their sin-pardoning Redeemer, and speaks to them as He Himself would have spoken openly, had He been sojourning still with them in the flesh. It does not even taunt them with the sin whose burden they have by repentance rolled away; but again and again so reminds them of it, as to keep them humble, and to impart a dread of contracting defilement from it at any future time. It does not disturb or distress them with doubts as to God's pardon of that offence; but only with a kind and wise precaution points out to them the place where their "foot slipped," and where the foe "rejoiced greatly" against them.

Conscience, too, *convinces of sin*. It takes off all flimsy coverings; it expels from all subterfuges; it lays bare guilt in its hideous reality. There is no possibility of escape from its power, in this respect, for the



Christian who prizes its dominion within his breast. We do not like to look at sin in its natural ugliness. We had rather, if possible, feel sure that there are excuses for every transgression we commit. Self-love, in its least pure forms, exists within the heart of the most upright believer, and prompts him—for the sake of preserving credit with good men, or of enjoying the spiritual peace he longs for, without previous trouble—to seek for these palliatives. But Conscience is not to be won by sophistries: it will haunt his breast day by day; it will frown upon him when he longs most to enjoy communion with God; it will infuse dark, uncomfortable thoughts into the exercises of those heretofore loved moments; it will aim at the expulsion of delusion, flattery, false peace, till either its purpose is gained and the soul rescued, or its perseverance in rebuke checked by the turbulence of evil passions, or the too prevalent dominancy of the carnal will—till

the believer is either lulled into deeper sleep through attention to the crafty suggestions of his arch-enemy, or is made to cry out with tears, "LORD, be merciful to me a sinner!"

Conscience *prevents the commission of sin*. Its warnings, if habitually heeded or encouraged, do not only come *after* the sin; they may also be heard before it. Taught by his invaluable adviser within, rendered watchful from the effects of previous falls, the Christian is brought into a habit of deliberation before he speaks or acts—even though he has not equal power over his thoughts. The swiftness of lightning cannot rival that of Conscience, in its haste to check evil. Take as an example a fit of anger. While yet the lips are closed, while yet the tempest is raging within, but has given little outward sign of its fury, we have a gentle hand laid, as it were, upon our shoulder. We turn round, and there is Conscience, looking closely into

our faces, with dumb but earnest eloquence. We are instantly brought to a stand—but we may, if we will, thrust that gentle, sad-looking spirit-form from us, and let our wild will have its way. Through Divine Grace, Conscience can do all things, *if we will it so*, but *without* this, it is utterly powerless. Let us only seek to acquire the habit of deliberation before we speak or act, and we shall soon be unable to commit sin without the previous intervention of Conscience to arrest our progress.

Conscience again *points out to us the model of true holiness, and sets in full light our grievous shortcomings*. The Saviour's active minister, it is fond of taking us to its Divine Master, that we may learn of Him how to rule our conduct, and gaze earnestly upon so lovely a Pattern of perfection. In seasons of the deepest spiritual peace, when the light and the warmth of divine Love stream most plentifully into the soul, Conscience reminds the believer that he is happy, and at rest, *not as a perfect saint*, but as a par-

done sinner. How necessary this distinction at such a time, to check the inroad of spiritual pride; to promote a reverent and lowly attitude towards the Redeemer; to secure the growth of that humility which is the foundation, and so the strength of all piety! In aiming, then, to obtain the approving smiles of Conscience, let us not think we shall ever be able to scale to heights loftier than our poor weak nature could bear. The more implicitly we obey this inward voice of God, the more humble it will seek to make us. How far, even at the best of times, the Christian can realize a sense of immunity from sin, and a fearlessness of falling again into its snares, may be seen, from the consideration that his holiest hours are those spent in following the footsteps of the sinless Saviour—a Presence in which he must ever feel no less abashed and guilt-stricken, than the very heavens are impure in the sight of their Adorable Creator.

CHAPTER III.

CAUSES OF INACTIVITY OF CONSCIENCE IN BELIEVERS.

A FRIEND too often repulsed in proffering acts of kindness or good advice, will not renew his well-meaning offices, believing them to be intrusive. And, unhappily, there are those among us whose career in sin is impetuous and headlong, because their consciences are hushed—"seared with a hot iron." There is little need, however, in these pages, to consider the sad case of such persons, so little can I realise the idea of their ever perusing them. But it is a matter of grave moment, that even among those who are solicitous to pass through

"the strait gate," and to journey along "the narrow way that leadeth unto life," there are causes in constant operation tending to retard the activity of the Conscience ; to weaken its effectiveness ; to render its ministry infrequent and feeble, rather than frequent and cogent. And such causes are fruitful parents of many hours of discomfort, and even agony of mind.

The difficulty to the believer of effecting, through the Grace of God, the clearance of his heart from all prepossessions and habits tending to hinder the work of his salvation, is one by no means to be under-rated. Merely to believe is not enough ; his faith must produce fruit ; every *thought* must "be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." And it is to be feared, that it is not an uncommon error among those sincere in their walk by faith, and intent upon the better things of the life to come, to occupy themselves in works of self-denial, and in ministries of good for Christ's sake, while they are yet not sufficiently careful

to exercise that control over their words and works in other respects which the spirit of the Gospel requires of them. There are places in their hearts insufficiently guarded, through which the enemy creeps in to harass and discourage them. They frequently feel troubled and desponding respecting their spiritual state, without being able to ascertain the immediate cause of it; and because this cannot be discovered, they are apt to assign the general reason that the evil one adopts that particular method of venting his malice against them.

And such is, no doubt, frequently the case; but it is very easy to allege proof that they may often be deceived in forming these conclusions. The discomfort may be attributed to the existence within them of unchastened evil, and evil often unsuspected too, the need of whose amendment, Conscience has, perhaps, again and again ineffectually suggested to their notice. The best men are prone to slight its warnings, when they too directly thwart strong inclina-

tions. Perceiving earnestness in the heart, the wise monitor has not ceased altogether to utter its warning voice as to that particular sin, but as if in the hope of inciting the Christian to closer and more exhaustive self-examination, it has addressed him in low, indistinct murmurs of disapprobation, such as are calculated to weaken his sense of that peace for which he strives, and to suggest doubts as to the stability of his present hopes. It will be well, perhaps, if God will bless such a course to the reader, that he should calmly, dispassionately, and with determined candour, examine the following suggested causes of the discomfort referred to; and if any one of them should bring forcibly to remembrance, the edge of conscientious warning, some time since blunted, let him, at any sacrifice, atone for his slight, by seeking forgiveness of God in his closet, on bended knee, and "setting a watch" at the neglected post in future.

Persisting in error with a view to keep up

one's self-importance, and a disposition to insist upon one's own sense of right, in selfish carelessness of others' feelings, greatly injure the activity of Conscience. The earnest believer would shrink from the encouragement in his heart of the unforgiving spirit; yet here is manifestly a phase of it. Collisions more or less serious, as to their nature, are perpetually liable to occur between Christians in this life; bitter words are exchanged between them, and mutual estrangement follows; each persuades himself that he is the aggrieved and not the aggressor; Conscience steps in, but in the heat of altercation, in the hurry and turmoil of the perturbed feelings, it is thrust aside as an intruder. Alas! the language of the heart so interrupted, too often is "Who made thee a ruler and judge over us?" or even, "*Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?*" And for the time, the sad, loving mentor turns aside at the rebuff of one so prejudiced to his own hurt; it is too soon grieved and repulsed.

But in calmer moments, its love will lead it to return again and again, and to ply its task of accusation in low pleading utterances. It seeks to show that forgiveness and forgetfulness of the wrong must go together, and that as long as the barrier to mutual good feeling remains, the unforgiving spirit must of necessity be entertained. Such a spirit feeds upon thoughts of pride and self-importance. Neither of the parties in contention, perhaps, resolutely strive to thrust the bitterness of ill-feeling from their hearts. It lurks and rankles in them. Conscience still urges the necessity of moral courage, pressing upon the real offender the paramount duty of offering reparation, and upon the offended, that of overlooking the offence; or its judicial scrutiny enables it to detect great evil in both. Both, perhaps, from their desire of still maintaining peace in their closet-hours, and at the Holy Table of the Lord, strive after magnanimity; they cross accidentally each other's path, exchange tokens of

cold recognition—it was an effort to them even to *do this*—they are each secretly pleased.

Yes: and at this juncture the ever-watchful evil one comes up:—he whispers “Peace, peace!” he urges persuasively that the forgiving spirit has been felt in such a case in either breast. As once he took the form of an angel of light, so now his wily cunning leads him to feel there is little chance of success over hearts predisposed to Christian virtue, unless he clothe himself in the garb of *Conscience*. In such disguise, he too often meets with pleased and ready listeners, and the witness for God within us has little power then of instilling the truth—of laying bare the deception practised upon those mistaken beings. But is it not easy to see that the spirituality of each has received a wound from which it is impossible, without special means, to recover?

Christians would doubtless feel their inward and spiritual life made greater progress; they would not suffer so much depression and despon-

dency in the hours set apart to converse with God and with their own hearts, if they would candidly, and at any sacrifice of self-importance, avow their weakness, or keep out of sight their strength, or thirst after mutual and unreserved reconciliation when brought together in such collisions as have been referred to. In such cases, where unanimity of feeling does not exist, there is reason to suspect the existence of the unforgiving spirit. And surely all candid minds will allow that the encouragement of carnal pride, the love of one's own dignity, whether right or wrong, as to an offence in which one is concerned, must exercise a blunting influence upon the naturally pointed edge of the warnings of Conscience. It may be urged here, that *forgetfulness* of an injury cannot easily follow forgiveness of it, on account of the impossibility of erasing from the memory impressions once so forcibly received. But resolutely to put the offence out of sight; to act as though it had never existed; to draw a deep black line across it in

the tablets of memory—this is to forget in such a case. We may never be able to plead ignorance of what that erasure conceals ; but let not another—no, not even the party once closely concerned in it with ourselves—discern any traces of the language that once was written beneath it.

Neglect of self-examination, even among the more earnest bearers of the cross, is another cause of inactivity of Conscience. Some, too much overlook the necessity of this work ; others are painfully timid and distrustful of themselves, and so look upon it as a duty they feel hardly prepared to face ; others, again, are deterred by real or accidental difficulties connected with it. The first place reliance upon their felt yearnings of heart after holiness, or upon a general habit of watchfulness, which frequently enables them to detect the entrance of an enemy into their hearts. But we cannot “hunger and thirst after righteousness” without being continually in danger of falling into

some snares of the evil one. Our God requires earnest, diligent, watchful *work* of us ; and the arch-enemy is one not to be thought of so lightly. It is well, indeed, that we should seek early after God, and that our trust should be “stayed upon the Living God ;” but in this state of trial we must not expect to enjoy the overflowings of His Love, without suffering, all along, the stern opposition to our coveted peace, of the world, the flesh, and the devil. We, who aim at these high spiritual attainments, are weak and fallible men, placed in the foremost rank of the battle against the legions of “the prince of the power of the air,” and crippled in our movements, by our own disqualifications, for so unequal a contest. The great Captain of our salvation is indeed near to help us ; but He expects that every energy on our part shall be alive to the sense of our danger, and every nerve exerted to the utmost to meet it. And those Christians, too, who flatter themselves that they are able to detect

at once *each* entrance of the enemy upon them, can have thought little of that enemy's untiring efforts to accomplish our destruction. How often do our very hearts play the traitor, and let him in upon us when we think all is well ! Then there are periods during which the most watchful are betrayed into slumber and listlessness ; and how shall we be able to discern the havoc that has meanwhile been wrought within, without careful retrospection ? We may be generally watchful, but moments of too great self-confidence may intervene, and only subsequent self-examination will enable us to see if we have stumbled at such seasons.

Timid Christians must beware of betrayal into wrong notions, with respect to their real state of heart in God's sight. And, from their confirmed habit of shrinking from self-examination, they are exposed to the dangers which have just been spoken of to a greater degree than even those who depend upon their *general* watchfulness. If we will not face our

own sinfulness, through fear, we might as well desist from the work of serving God altogether. Vague impressions of one's sinfulness of nature, without the power of recognising the sins, by their name, of which we have been guilty, will not help us to effect that "clearing of our selves" in confession to our Maker, which ought to stand at the very beginning of our devotions. Such timidity is, indeed, unless overborne, tantamount to positive disobedience to Him who commands, "Commune with your heart upon your bed, and be still." No more can we expect God's blessing upon mere vague confession, such as can have very little, at most, of contrition in it, than we can hope even to know our own vileness without moral hardihood sufficient to face it, or to feel within us the soaring upward of love to Him, whom, professing to love, we disobey. The case of those who neglect self-scrutiny, on account of real or accidental difficulties connected with it, will, it is hoped, be met in the next chapter.

In one word, then, "Let a man examine himself" constantly, if he would have his conscience properly active. Its exercise in behalf of his soul's salvation has diligence proportioned to his own estimation of the importance of the work before him, as a responsible being, and to his own zeal in seeking, through God's grace, to accomplish it.

Remissness in the performance of other religious duties is another cause of the inactivity of conscience. Alas! that it should be needful to find such fault with the most sincere, most loving Christian! How apt to grow chill is our love, how weak our faith, which sometimes stands upon the verge of positive unbelief, how faint and flickering our hope! How glad we are to meet with a plausible excuse for slight and superficial meditation upon God's Word, for hurried, formal lip-service in prayer and praise, for desertions of the House of God, for apathy in visiting the poor, the sick, the afflicted, the impenitent, for Christ's sake!

And the soul, failing to receive Divine nourishment through these sources, stands still, even as the mill-wheel, when the water by which it is impelled at other times is sluggish, or at rest. Unless God Himself, or His ministers, angels, or men, rouse it from such a state, bringing it back to the neglected Bible, to real prayerfulness, real charity, all its graces must droop and die. Conscience, in such a case, is very likely to act in sympathy with all else in the heart that is meant to conduce to man's salvation. If love to God be dull and cold, if prayer have relapsed into mere soul-less language, if faith sleeps, if the call of the Sabbath bell be unheeded, if lassitude pervade the whole spiritual system, Conscience may naturally be expected to be wholly, for the time, or nearly, silent—discouraged, as it were, from the exercise of its salutary influences by the many repulses, the little attention it must have experienced from the soul during its gradual declension into so sad a condition. Its earlier

warnings are louder, more pressing, not so easily silenced ; but where disregarded, or only grudgingly and lifelessly obeyed, it draws back, as if in sadness, from the wayward heart of which it has charge, and perhaps selects only some season of peculiar trouble, or danger, or powerful religious impression, for its return, in the fulness of its strength to awaken, to point out the ground to be retraced,—the religious peace to be recovered.

Illiberality of heart in the cause of Christ will often produce a slumbering, inactive state of Conscience. That breast is no temple for God's constant indwelling wherein covetousness holds sway. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." It may be thought that some of these counsels and suggestions overshoot the mark. But, in this state of imperfection and sin, we can surely find no difficulty in conceiving that there are many hearts earnestly intent upon offering true service to Almighty God, which are yet peculiarly weak, worked upon strongly

by the force of besetting sin, with little discrimination to discern their danger, and less moral courage to fit them for meeting it. That some men, even to hoar hairs, profess a zeal for God's honour and service, a certain solicitude for the spiritual welfare of others, and concern for their own personal salvation, while yet their hearts are thickly crusted over with a worldly, covetous spirit, which checks the fruitfulness of their faith, and often renders them gloomy and desponding, in anticipation of eternity, is hardly to be doubted.

And there may be cases when men are partially blind as to their perception of the path of duty marked out for them. Fears predominate, and love is low. They long to feel within them the saving power of Christ, in a sense of sins forgiven, and in hopes of eternal life, bright and glowing, possessing them, but go on unsatisfactorily, from day to day, with an aching sense of want, as though something in the heart were lacking, and without which no

spiritual comfort can be realized. "What lack I yet?" asked the type of many such as these in the Gospel. "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me." The response made by such characters, should Conscience ever bring the case strongly before them, would show how far their imagined devotedness of heart to God is sincere, or how far they have been struggling during their lives to blend together the love of two things as widely opposite as the poles are distant from each other. But I assume, now, the existence, in such cases, of regret for the narrow-heartedness of past years, of consciousness, after long sleep, that they have slighted the earnest warnings of Conscience, as to their deficiency of Christian liberality, and of solemn determination, with God's grace, to advance against the bulwark Satan has thus raised within them.

Should such men instantly pray that they

upon the tablets of their memory the precise hour, when, as they felt, they were made the subjects of a radical change of heart, and deemed themselves secure thenceforward of eternal life. Satan and sin cease from that specified time to be objects of dread to them, since they hold it impossible to fall beneath the dominion of the one, or to commit the other.

Now, it is easy to conceive that fearful mistakes may arise out of such opinions as these. The prophet Ezekiel* brings before us a supposed case of "the righteous man turning away from his righteousness." The Redeemer Himself refused the request of two of His most favoured apostles, when they sought of Him the promise of their future unconditional participation in the heavenly dignities. And the apostle's recommendation to the too confident in spiritual things is, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." There must be delusion in such doctrines as these. Is it impossible

* Ezekiel xviii.

* 1 Cor. x. 12.

that "the righteousness which is of God by faith," should be removed from men when faith itself sinks into a mere name? Upon what assumption can the idea be founded, that the disciple now is safer than the apostles of old? Why should there now be no fear of falling from Grace given, when the apostle foresaw distinctly such fears among the dangers environing the converts of his own day?

The religious life must ever be as the actual—subject to changes and chances, heat and cold, health and disease, increase and decay. They who know anything at all of the proneness of the heart of man to avoid labour, as much as possible, in spiritual matters,—to obtain a sense of pardon at the expense of the least possible flow of penitence, and an assurance of heaven without the pain of incessant watchfulness, zeal, self-denial, to obtain it, would surely look, with the keenest suspicion, upon a creed holding forth such easy terms as these. The Christian is to bear the Cross before he can

hope to wear the Crown. Are there no crosses formed of internal as well as of external trials? The evil one followed the Redeemer almost to the last gasp; and is it not said, "The disciple shall be as his Master, the servant as his Lord?" Are no self-denials required — no fastings and mournings for sin — no crucifixion of the carnal will? Surely crosses are to be met with and to be borne patiently and meekly among these things. Can there be any Christians, who never feel that prayer is a weariness to them, that there are seasons of spiritual drought — seasons when icy numbness pervades the heart's love, and when external and internal troubles and temptations drag down the heart's faith? Is there no danger of ruin here — that any Christian foreseeing he must pass through so much calculated to shake his courage, to thwart his hope, to alienate, for the time at least, his peace, should yet promise himself, a feeble, fallible man — freedom from all actual commissions of sin and consequent safety at the

last? "In the world ye shall have tribulation," was our blessed Lord's assurance to His disciples. But is this tribulation spoken of with reference to external trials only? Let the sequel shew — "But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Surely, few would hesitate to express their conviction that a reference is here made more particularly to the life-long contest each warrior of the Cross must wage with bitter and sleepless foes to his best peace, if he would be saved in the last great day.

If the Christian be a warrior, the foe with whom he must wage war is presupposed in the very name alone thus given him. If he be a sinner still, even after the conversion to God just as weak, as liable to err, as prone naturally to obey the cravings of baser appetites, as he was before, is he to expect immunity from the attacks of that foe? If Conscience has been given as a controlling power over the heart of man, can a sinner, after conversion, dispense with its assistance altogether;

or is it thenceforth intended alone to flatter and to praise him? O let such Christians as we now have before us, look well to these things. If they neglect self-examination, from its irksomeness, or from an overweening sense of their eternal safety, they lay down a cross which they are distinctly commanded to take up. It is possible to *dream* of heaven, while the wedding-garment for the Lamb's great marriage supper is thought most easy to be procured. Too many think the price of it is easily paid. But we have to "resist even unto blood fighting against sin." Let the soul be lulled by sweet visions of heaven, and it may overlook altogether the terrible intermediate struggle, and awake at last to find it has mistaken fiction for fact; shadow for substance; dreams for realities. Conscience is our great safeguard against the inroads of evil: let the religious imaginations, pleasant and flowery as they are, to which this allusion has been made, once lead us to care little about its

due exercise within us, and we may be irrecoverably lost. God, of His great mercy, prevent it.

There is a tendency, too, *to give to the dictates of Conscience only a secondary place in our consideration*, which checks its activity. Only "the spirit of a man that is within him," can know his thoughts, and discern the motives of his actions. How often, with reference to our purposes, would inclination and duty draw us in different directions! The calls of Conscience, adjusting the matter in dispute between the two, are frequently, at such a season, loud and imperative; but their requirements may be disagreeable to us, as deterring us from the course we wish to pursue. We then become troubled and perplexed—troubled at the prospect of our desires being thwarted; perplexed from our anxiety to give the greater weight to the arguments in the scale of inclination. The case in question is, however, portrayed vividly enough

in all its bearings *to our own eye*. The workings of our thoughts, the depths of our souls are but mystery and darkness to others. As if forgetful of this, and forgetful that our words of explanation are likely to convey only a partial and prejudiced view of the subject, and putting altogether out of sight, for the moment, considerations which, if candidly imparted to our earthly friend and adviser, would probably lead him at once to second the entreaties of Conscience, we yet seek the decision of such an one. Imperfect in his discernment of the matter, he perhaps, to our satisfaction, determines that our inclination is just and right; and so duty is disregarded, and its strong advocate within us silenced.

Such haltings as these between two opinions, are probably as common in the walk by faith as they are fatal to the heart's true peace. We strive to think that our friend possessed more insight into the case than any one would suspect: we repel, after some effort, the yet

discomfort-causing monitor in the breast, and turn deaf ears to its representations.

In proportion to the frequency in occurrence of such cases, the will is apt to become more wayward and perverse,—the man himself more firmly rooted in the habit of leaning to the side of inclination; and Conscience, often repulsed, stands aloof. Faith loses, in this way, very much of its fruitfulness; and, indeed, too often dwindles away into a mere profession; crosses and self-denials for the cause of Christ the heart learns to repudiate; religious feelings and actions are encouraged and indulged in, as far as they may be convenient or subservient to the love of self. And surely, under such circumstances, the heart must either be full of forebodings, from which it will take no trouble to be rescued, or religion must be cold, barren sentiment, destitute of that keen sense of moral responsibility which ought to pervade it, and to be the channel of im-

parting to it energy and vitality, if final salvation is to be attained.

One cause more, of the too frequent inactivity of Conscience in believers, may be noticed:—*the tendency to neglect, in all its strict obligation upon us, our duty to our neighbour.* There are some hearts pre-disposed to generosity—even to an excess,—anxious to minister to the temporal and spiritual necessities of others; restless if their end cannot be attained, and apt even to murmur at their disappointment; but which are yet most hard to be trained to the observance of duties equally high. Who does not know instances where comparatively lavish expenditure is made to forward the happiness of others without a corresponding self-denial or economy on the part of the donor.

And how frequently, in such a case, his own worldly affairs become embarrassed! Here is no lack of *honest principle*;—such a man would

recoil, with a sense of personal innocence, from the bare insinuation :—but the heart has not taken the head into its counsels. The head, full of solid Christian knowledge, and the heart full of Christian love, ever act as a salutary check upon each other. Conscience will be instant, for a while, in its reproofs of such excesses, as the earnest natures, just referred to, commit ; but if they be blindly swayed by their ruling passion, they will often try, in every possible way, to find excuses for their proceedings, and to hush the remonstrances of the inward monitor God has given them. If they are men who would “bestow all their goods to feed the poor,” if they would submit to almost any self-denial for the love of Christ, they yet are too hurried in their actions,—too quick in carrying their motives into execution,—too morally weak to bear to be confronted with a virtue which would lead them to abstain from their favourite practices.

There surely must be great danger here. It

is sad ; it gives us a humiliating view of all human excellence, to think that so many of the Redeemer's most devoted servants at heart, and who are drawn, through love of Him, into a liberality He never gave them means to indulge, should, in other respects, be so guilty of weakness, and, it is to be feared too, of positive disobedience.

Christians possessed by these tendencies are apt to object to the remonstrances of Conscience, their own fears of the spiritual life within them becoming unnerved and faint, if made to desist from their wonted course of action. They have enjoyed a sweet peace, as they have gone about striving to do good, in the sense that they thus were humbly treading in the footmarks of the Saviour of sinners : they have been absorbed in their self-appointed work : their very heart-strings are wound closely around it. They dread, lest, through forced abstinence from generous deeds, the now warm and freely

flowing feelings may become iced over, and leave them, as to their love to Godward, benumbed and miserable. But once let them give way to Conscience, and follow its dictates, and they shall soon know the wisdom and the gain of such obedience. The nature's best feelings, that, full of religious fervour, have their course turned for a while into other channels, cannot lose their characteristic mark. Formerly, the sunlight of Divine Favour seemed to them to throw all its blessed heat and brightness upon a *detached portion* of their spiritual life: now they shall soon find it will rest upon, perhaps, the whole of it.

It may be, that in His Love for such natures, God will once more, after an interval, permit their energies to flow forth again through their former channel, purified, strengthened, made more heavenly through their temporary divergence. Or if not, there will yet be wellings forth of devout aspirations after the eternal good of men, and

God may give them the delight of beholding others of His devoted servants engaged as heartily in the work from which He withdrew themselves. And they will, at all events, experience the peace resulting from the heart's consciousness of generous emotions, even though they may be denied the same expression as before. They will yet find vent in prayers, which shall overstream and abundantly bless the hearts whence they arise. It is the *intention*, rather than the *action*, that is precious in God's sight. It is true there are cases in which the one is incomplete and worthless without the other; but, in such as these just considered, the *intention* is covered with all the radiance of the *action*, which indulged in at the expense of others, becomes positively sinful.

These suggested causes of the inactivity of the Conscience in believers, are only a few selected from the many which they who, through God's Grace, have learned to be skilful

in reading the heart, must discover for themselves. They have been given at some length, and with, perhaps, some minuteness of detail, from the feeling that earnest persons have not been sufficiently careful in seeking to disengage from its entanglement, the confused knot of the many motives that help to mould human character. And it is hoped that the urgent, and indeed indispensable necessity of close and constant self-examination, may have been seen in a little clearer light through the medium of God's blessing upon this chapter; and that many Christians will at once apply themselves to the solemn performance of a duty, which will reveal to them unsuspected dark and evil portions of their characters, and tend to increase their watchfulness,—to promote more intimate self-knowledge,—to realize better the sense of God's Presence near, and favour towards them, and to brighten their hopes of Life everlasting.

CHAPTER IV.

DIFFICULTIES CONNECTED WITH SELF-EXAMINATION.

WHEN once we have discerned that one definite path of duty has been marked out for us by Almighty God, no possible excuse can be made for those who do not resolutely strike into and make their way along it. If another road be taken, all for a brief period may be well. The skies of earthly prosperity may be bright and clear, friends and fellow-travellers, holding the same perverse views, may be numerous, and help much to cheat the journey of its tediousness; and the spirits may be generally as glee-some and as careless as the road is smooth, and the wayside beguilements agreeable; but the

end of such a course is ruin, irretrievable and eternal.

The sinner, who, through God's Grace, has resolutely turned his back upon the world, regarding himself as a citizen of "a better country, that is a heavenly," has chosen for himself a course of pursuit unspeakably happy, as to its final results, but one which cannot fail to be irksome to his nature, as here constituted, until those results are attained. If drawn away from things "of the earth, earthy," through the agency of powerful appeals to the imagination, and word-pictures of the bright land beyond the tomb, he is likely to feel his heart sink within him before his pilgrimage has been long commenced. If, again, he has been appalled by the threatened terrors awaiting the ungodly in another state of being, and has thus been driven, as it were by force, into the "narrow way that leadeth unto Life," there is little prospect of his circumstances being improved, unless, through a radical

change of views and feelings, his purpose acquires a stability over him which nothing can weaken or destroy.

The best possible motive for becoming Christians, not by profession only, but in deed and in truth, is "Love to Him Who hath first Loved us." Such love is no ordinary, common, transient sensation. It is one whose first thrill we felt on Calvary, which has since been nursed by holy thoughts, and has testified its growth and its strength in holy actions. Intense human love keeps its object ever in mind, clings tenderly to that object day by day, and year by year, sympathizes with it in sorrow and in joy, bears with its failings, defends it from enemies, suffers for it keen pain and self-denial, is the last to leave it, trusts in it, is guided by it, grieves bitterly when the last sad parting comes. And thus, in a sense far higher, must heart-love for the Redeemer operate upon those who would "see Him hereafter as He is," and be with Him, and in Him, through eternal

ages. Service to Him, once undertaken, must be faithful to the last. In obedience, it must not swerve; in danger, it must not falter; in temptation, it must not succumb; in evil days, it must remain firm and loyal.

So, then, not only because the "disciple must be as his Master, the servant as his Lord," are sincere Christians expected to rest patiently in a lot of suffering and self-denial upon earth, but also because such is their portion here, and the Redeemer *commands* them to embrace it with thankfulness, if they would be saved by Him from the curse. Enquiry as to His reasons for appointing to His followers trouble, and weariness, and no open vision in this life of "the glory that shall be revealed" hereafter to animate them in faint and feeble hours, is not once to be thought of. In fleeing from an evil world to the Cross of Christ, for peace and safety, we know alike our toils and our rest, our warfare and the nature of our victory; "faith has taken away the old, and

has made all things new." We have been led to resign "the pomps and vanities of this wicked world," "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," in favour of the soul's eternal salvation. In so doing, we bind ourselves to bear the yoke and to carry the burden of the sinner's Saviour: we virtually obey that Divine injunction, "Come, take up your cross, and follow Me." Whether it is a cross calculated to gall and fret the spirits of the "Old Adam" or not, it is useless to enquire. The crown cannot be worn till the cross has been endured.

One of the crosses to whose burden we must submit in all loving contentment and thankfulness, is Self-examination. Its very nature is wearisome to the flesh and to the spirit; its subjects are calculated to perplex us from their multiplicity and their subtlety, its process is by no means the easy one we could have wished it to be in our seasons of discontent, and we are imperfectly adapted for carrying it on, from

limited insight, proneness to err, love of self-approbation, indolence of will, and readiness to relinquish, on the first appearance of a difficulty, a task that then appears so much above us.

And truly *it is* above us: our weakness cannot, of itself, grapple with all its requirements. Yet He Who, as our Creator, knows all the secrets of our nature, requires us to perform it. Is there a mystery in this? Yes; but it is surely one no greater than other mysteries connected with a life of working faith in the Son of God. Our Maker is no austere task-master herein. He asks of man what man alone cannot perform, for the simple reason that He is Himself our Strength,—Himself works *for* us and *in* us all that He requires *of* us. Our faith is vain, our love languid and chill, if, when engaged in close self-scrutiny, we cannot see and feel that God is within, or near us, suggesting the questions to be put, gazing into the answers that shall be given; *Present*, that all evil spirits, who would cause

our hearts to return false answers, may be driven away, and that, enjoying such earnest and foretaste of His care for our souls, we may not be afraid to face our own vileness : *Present*, that we may love Him, and wonder, and trust in Him the more for such infinite condescension to the fallen rebel; and that when the tedious work is over, and the contrite tears have been poured forth, and the faltering, but earnest, confession has been made, He may hush our fears, and raise us from the dust, and whisper, "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee": "Go, and sin no more."

Bearing, then, in mind this truth — one of those secrets of the Lord which are with them that fear Him — that however hard or impossible it may seem at first sight to fulfil some of the duties required of those who would lead a godly life, yet Christ Himself, *with* Whom in God that life is hid, works *in* us, and is The Strength of our human weakness, let us briefly glance at a few of the more obvious difficulties

to be met with in Self-examination. It is imperative that we should know wherein our deficiencies lie, that we may make them the subject of special prayer to our Almighty Inworker, in whom "rooted, grounded, built, up," we shall be presented "holy and unblameable and unproveable" in the Father's sight at the last great day.

The naturally restless activity of the mind is one great difficulty in the way of self-scrutiny. Who can keep pace with his own thoughts? Who can pretend to read them all? Who can unwind them from the confused and entangled knot into which they run? Who can tell how many varying impressions for good or for evil sweep over and mould their character in even a few moments of time? The closest, minutest scrutiny would, at best, do nothing more than enable us, for an instant, to see them crossing, and re-crossing, and melting into each other, disappearing, and starting up again, we know not whence, and altogether forming a

throng of crowded creations, undistinguishable as to their individuality. To number these, to put the good on one side, the evil on the other, would indeed be impossible. The very attempt would make the brain as dizzy, the mental sight as blind as though we were to fix an earnest gaze upon the sun, and try to count the particles of light emerging from its vast body.

And yet such thoughts are characteristic of moral goodness or moral depravity. They take their colour and complexion from the heart, out of which "are the issues of life." It is the heart, then, into which we must look. There is the great fountain whence those unnumbered rapid streamlets emerge and disperse themselves over the life. Let the fountain be cleansed, and impurity will not, in this case, mingle with the currents issuing from it. There may be noxious vapours near them; there may be evil, hurtful, impure currents poured into them after they have left their source; but if that source be well tended, there is no danger of their character becoming changed.

Every man can tell, through the aid of earnest prayer and watchfulness, to what his heart most prompts him. And though he cannot distinguish every thought, idea, desire, flowing from it so as to put it down in clear, intelligible language, he may be able to arrive at just and right conclusions as to his safety or his danger in spiritual things, arising from them, if he examines well the bias of such thoughts, words, and works, as he *can* recollect — such as, among the otherwise undistinguishable throng, he can discern, possess a clearly-marked outline or shape.

Take courage, then, reader. If you desire to know whether your soul is athirst for God, whether “The Spirit Witnesses with your spirit” that you are a child of God, appeal not to the thoughts, fused, as it were, in a whirlwind, to answer your enquiries. Sit down with your heart in calm, collected moments. God will guide it to satisfy your cravings, if only you are true to your own purpose; resolute to acknow-

ledge and deplore the existence of evil machinations within it, when you find them there, steady and energetic in your attempts, in the Strength of Christ, to thrust them forth. The heart, indeed, will perpetually shew you very much to wound and discourage your hopes, it never will be free from impurity,—no, not even in your best hours. But if, through close self-examination, you can arrive at the happiness of knowing that the *general* bias of your thoughts is good,—that all your *intentions* and *struggles* are enlisted on the side of virtue; that you are determined, with God's help, to make no compromise with evil, you need not feel burdened and distressed because the number of your thoughts bewilder you. Undoubtedly there will be evil, as well as good, in them, but contrition for and confession of the evil you *can* discern, will ensure for you the pardoning Mercies of the Most High, which are inexhaustible, in far greater proportion than *all* your thoughts and imaginations are perplexing and countless.

Weakness of memory opposes another difficulty in the way of self-examination. "Who can tell how oft he offendeth?" asks the Psalmist. "Cleanse thou me from my secret faults." Many who, perhaps, in the earlier hours of the day, arrested themselves in a thought, or a look, or a word, or an action that was sinful, are unable, when the period of solemn review arrives, to recall to mind the nature of their offence. They have learned to be watchful; and this habit of watching has enabled them to discover so many dark places, so many ill-defended inlets in the heart, and so many sins of diverse natures which have effected an entrance there, that they are at a loss to determine which of the many enemies to their peace it was that made that particular inroad. Although they thought the offence deeply "printed upon their remembrance" at the time of its commission, yet the mental occupation that followed, or a constitutional forgetfulness have erased the record entirely.

This is a great discouragement to those who, before closing each day, desire, with moderate facility, to summon before them, and to "talk with its past hours." The labour of recall may be almost, if not quite, fruitless; they may be tempted to grow weary of self-examination, and, in a little while, to make of it a lax and hurried exercise. They become troubled as to the wording of their addresses before the Mercy-Seat. They wanted to have dragged that sin by name before God—to have expressed to Him their sincere hatred of it; but it seems to have eluded their grasp as though it feared coming to the light. Their expression of penitence, then, appears to them only half-hearted, vague, and such as, they fear, the Hearer of prayer will not accept. Such cases as these call for sympathy, consideration, and the suggestion, if possible, of some remedy to relieve them. It helps the soul greatly in the concentration upon the sacred exercise of self-scrutiny of its powers,—which are so apt to

become wearied,—when, in the course of a reasonably short time devoted to meditation and prayer, it can see the sins of the day before it; and, as it were, read them over as so many counts of an indictment against it.

I am far from thinking some artificial remedy* may not be contrived to meet this want. Let the earnest-hearted Christian keep upon his person a book for memoranda, sacred to God and to himself, so ruled as to contain small spaces for each of his more responsible hours; and let him then, when needful, enter the initial letter of a word, describing the sin committed, in the space set apart to the hour when it occurred. The simple initial will tend much to make him master, when he desires it, of the whole circumstances connected with his transgression: its insertion would require but the stroke of a pencil, and a moment's halt—which surely, in a matter of such importance, could not be grudged. Such a plan, even the most

* See Appendix (A).

unlearned might soon bring themselves to adopt. But if, from any peculiar circumstances, such entry be impracticable, let those, who are dismayed because they cannot with ease recollect their sins, flee for comfort to "that Great High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities;" Who discerns their trouble, as well as anxiety, to dwell upon their guilt,—and Who will, in infinite Love and Compassion, blot out such transgression, so that its voice against them shall be silenced. Let them, however, *first*, as a token of their earnestness, leave no means untried of recalling the past more or less vividly, remembering that God's consolations and forgivenesses are not for the slothful, but for the diligent soul. Such initial letters would, indeed, tend to put before them a black record of the day's spiritual life; but this, it is hoped, would render them, by God's grace, more and more humble; lead them to see, in the strongest light, their urgent need of extreme watchfulness; and make them more fer-

vent in confession to Him of whom the Spirit has caused it to be written*—"He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed."

Deficiency of watchfulness renders self-examination a work of extreme difficulty. But we cannot conscientiously be lenient to ourselves, if we rest the neglect of our bounden duty upon so trivial an excuse as this. The same man who would complain, "I am too busy to watch myself so narrowly," can yet doubtless find time for occasional enjoyment, even when it interferes with his most pressing duties, to do this. There are pauses in the most active life—pauses sufficiently long to recognize a sin, and to send up a secret and unsuspected petition for its forgiveness. The book, suggested before the reader's notice, may be taken out in a moment: its nature need not be at all known

* Isaiah liii. 5.

by the bystanders : it may, in a moment, receive the record, which can be pondered upon in the closet of private prayer.

Of what avail is "the willing spirit," without watchfulness? If the heart were not, as it is, at all times liable to be full of our ghostly enemies, the need of cautious self-observation would have been, perhaps, less insisted upon in the Bible than we find it to be. Surely the Saviour's Voice, echoing through the long sweep of eighteen hundred years, must come with a strong *personal* appeal to the feelings of those who make the idle excuse given above, if they allow themselves a moment's reflection. "What I say unto you, I say unto all—watch!"* We may never know our besetting sins at all,—we certainly shall never discern to how many other noxious weeds of iniquity within us they give birth,—if we do not *at once* form that habit of close, vigilant, faithful self-inspection, which shall, through God's blessing, enable us to feel

* St. Mark xiii. 37.

the pulses of our spiritual life. Nor can true penitence be said to dwell with so much carelessness. It cannot be too emphatically urged, that mere general, indefinite confession of sin is not enough. We must *labour* to drag out each sin, arrested and chained through the indwelling Omnipotence of the Redeemer, before God. We must bear to look at each ugly form that would work us so much mischief, as we pour forth our supplications for pardon, Grace, and strength. This must be our work "while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work."*

Misapprehensions arising from the deceitful nature of the heart, give rise to another difficulty in self-examination. Our hearts will, if possible, tempt us into feelings of self-complacency, when engaged in this duty. We may be drawn away into the mistake of taking too cursory a view of questionably good motives. Our anxiety to come out of the ordeal with as much com-

* St. John ix. 4.

fort as possible to the soul, may lead us, unless most wary, to be unfaithful. This, therefore, is a grave error to be prayerfully guarded against. Many an action that, taken by itself, looks fair and bright, loses its ingenuousness and its lustre, when its motive too is taken into the account. Cases may arise in which it will be found difficult to give, especially to words and works, their true character. But such misapprehensions need not occur, if the proper caution and watchfulness be brought to bear upon our inquiries into self. It will be needful to pause, and narrowly examine any portion of our past conduct, which, on mental review, presents itself before us in favourable guise; and even "to rejoice with trembling," if it will bear, and still look bright under the stronger tests. We may, with greater readiness, receive a condemnation passed upon us by conscience than an acquittal; because the heart is naturally averse to self-conviction.

Many may be tempted to shun self-examina-

tion, *because they distrust their power of insight into themselves.* Such are often anxious watchers of their thoughts, words, and works. They strive to yield to God their best affections, and to feel that their treasures are laid up in heaven; but, in spite of all these struggles, there rests upon their spirits a gloomy disquietude. If a thrill of spiritual joy, or the indescribable calm of spiritual peace, visit their souls, they look at this circumstance afterwards as, at best, only a dimly hopeful sign of their acceptance in the sight of God. In the hours of spiritual dearth to which even the most earnest Christians are subject, they are tempted to despair, as persons thrust without the pale of God's Mercies in Christ Jesus. Again and again, they doubt whether they have ever uttered a real prayer,—whether they have ever truly believed,—have ever done anything which the Redeemer has accepted as proof of their love to Him. Notwithstanding all this inward darkness and dreariness, they strive, day by

day, to look upward; but they feel themselves to be miserable and faint-hearted. And when the hour of self-examination comes, they shudder at the idea of meeting it: they seem to possess so little of vitality, so much apathy and unconcern about eternal things. Knowing that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," they regard it as an enemy for which they are in no way a match; and feel that they are sure to become victims of its deceit, in seeking to make themselves acquainted with its doings. This is a total want of all assurance as to their being in God's favour, which it is pitiable to contemplate. Some, constitutionally warm in temperament, hasty and impulsive, are apt to run into an opposite extreme—who yet possess, perhaps, less real faith and love, are less watchful, less prayerful, less "jealous over themselves with a godly jealousy" than the class just referred to, whose gloom of soul seems, as it were, a disease. Let such follow the example of the

Psalmist: "When I am in heaviness, I will think upon God: when my heart is vexed within me, I will complain." It may be that they are too hasty, too sanguine in their expectations of the visits of God to their souls. They overlook, perhaps, the record of His wonted visitations to His saints of old. "They hope, but do not *patiently wait* for the salvation of the Lord." Let them see to this point. And why such distrust respecting self-examination? Are they slow to believe the Scriptures? St. Paul would never have given that rule, nor have put that emphatic question to the Corinthians—"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not, your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"* Had he not been Divinely taught, himself, and Divinely inspired to teach others that such examination will certainly lead to the attainment of the proof it is made to seek for. Nor

* 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

could he have dared to say so much of the capabilities of human knowledge to discern the indwelling Presence of God in the soul, if really there, unless the Holy Spirit had directed him to say it. It was in assurance of its truth that he wrote—"The Spirit Itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God."* Let distrustful Christians muse upon such texts as these just before they begin the work of self-scrutiny; and, if they persevere, they shall in due time become more confident as to their powers of intuition of their own hearts, and happier as to their religious experiences.

Continued assaults of sin and Satan render difficult the work of Self-examination. The hour may be the stillest, the room the most retired in which the Christian communes with himself, but no pause in human activities, no preparedness of the mind to enter on its sacred work can shut out these ghostly enemies of

* Romans viii. 16.

our peace. Think not, then, the work can go on without their intrusion. Remember our Master's burdened cry upon the Cross, when He quoted and applied to His own case the opening words of the twenty-second psalm. But counterbalance this sad truth with one of the most beautiful and consolatory. Where Satan tempts and harasses, God is present to keep His loving servant's terrible foe in check, and to hold him back from falling into the snare. "And if God be for us, who *can* be against us?" When the Evil One's emissaries taunt or allure, there is the sweet ministry of the heavenly host to guard the souls they are commissioned to watch over from all danger. *Not* that either Almighty God or His angels can help us without our *perfect willingness*. But once let our own wills be blended with the Divine will, and, however weak the strength we put forth, still, if it be all we have, it is enough, and God will save us. It is very much to be feared that even the most pio

Christians hear the voices of the Evil One and his angels, seeking to interrupt their devotions, sooner than they do the Voice of God and the whispers of the blessed angels, encouraging them to persevere. Such a circumstance displays weakness of faith, shows that the sense of the Almighty's Presence is not sufficiently realized, that sufficient confidence is not placed in His Fatherly Care of those who are His sons and daughters in Christ Jesus. "MY sheep hear My Voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My Hand. MY Father which gave them Me is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's Hand."* So spoke our blessed Saviour, the Good Shepherd of souls that are athirst for Him—a thirst they prove by bringing themselves into so searching an ordeal of self-scrutiny—a process too wearisome for the

* St. John x. 27-29.

natural man to indulge in. And such shall often hear the voices of the "roaring lion" and of devouring wolves close at hand, even in their most solemn moments, but the Good Shepherd has given His life for the sheep, that they may be safe. Let not, then, empty sounds terrify or distract them. Rather let them, when most sensible of these evil interruptions, turn their glances inwardly, and see if they have any Love of God in their hearts, however low and scant. If they can find within them even the least portion of this Grace living, and yearning after its own extension, it is a plain proof that He who bestowed it is also there, for that Love is the warmth of the Indwelling Spirit with Whom the Redeemer is One, not even the minutest particle of which could exist in a heart careless as to its renewal unto holiness.

Many, perhaps, would complain, when urged to this duty of self-examination, that they cannot obtain *the retirement requisite for its per-*

formance. It will be enough to meet this objection in only a few words. There are, of course, numerous cases in which Christians cannot have sleeping apartments to themselves exclusively. They would shrink from the observation of the other occupant of the room, wishing to keep this devotional exercise sacred to God and themselves. And still they may do so. If the knee cannot be bent in lowly worship at the bed-side sufficiently long for the accomplishment of the work of self-scrutiny, the spirit can prostrate itself before the Throne of the Mercy-Seat, while the head reclines upon the pillow. Let not this be understood as a defence of the slothful, irreverent *habit* with some of offering up the evening prayer, when the limbs are reposing upon the bed. I allude not to any other duty now, than that of self-examination. Let the duty be kept, if possible, in reserve, until sleep shall have overtaken the senses of the companion of the bed-room. Only the

Eyes of God and of the spirit-witnesses can then survey the employment, and the retirement will be really as close, for a purpose so purely spiritual, and whose questions may be asked in a whisper, or even by the thoughts alone, as if the questioner were sole occupant of the apartment.

Mental and bodily fatigue constitute another difficulty in self-examination, at the extreme close of the day. Is, then, the duty to be foregone? Does Almighty God make special allowance, in such cases, for putting it away? Does "the Holy Spirit bear witness with our spirits," *without* self-examination? Are there any exceptional cases expressed in those texts of Holy Scripture which so clearly enforce it? Assuredly not. The work, then, *must* be carried on if we would be safe.

It is true there are many cases of incapacity for it through illness,—upon which, we cannot doubt, God looks with indulgence, if the duty has not been

neglected previously. Then it is with peculiarly irresistible force that "the corruptible body presseth down the soul that would muse upon many things." The powers of the soul, and of the mind, sympathize with those of the weakened frame. The disease of the one too often communicates itself to the other. The sick person cannot rein in, or concentrate his thoughts. He cannot meditate, perhaps, upon the simplest text. How often these trying seasons occur, and how forcibly they preach the lesson, that self-examination must not be left for the bed of sickness and death! How weak and confused, then, the soul's retrospect of past years! Only One can cause water to flow from the hard rock. And even He—has He not again and again, in days of health, sought to do this, and found it unproductive? That thick ice-crust over the spiritual feelings, which years of disgraceful and ungrateful neglect have brought upon them, is not to be broken up when life is low, except through a

miracle—which no careless, God-forgetting sinner is encouraged to expect.

But to return to our former question. Is the duty of self-examination, in the case of ordinary fatigue, to be foregone? No: it cannot be. An earlier hour in the evening must be chosen: other duties, which, however, important, are far less important than this, must be put aside, or deferred: retirement, that of withdrawal of ourselves from others, or of abstraction of the spirit when in the presence of others,—must be resorted to, rather than that the work should be left undone. Let some season be taken when the faculties are less dormant. If we have a mission of mercy for Christ's sake to others, yet to be executed, let self-examination be conducted by the way. If we must sit with others, we may take up a book, or close the eyes. No human vision can pierce into our purpose. It may be thought we are reading, or asleep, while really we are sifting out our

conduct during the past few hours. Only a few general suggestions can be made in such a case as this,—but surely every Christian, knowing the urgent need of his attention to self-scrutiny, and perceiving the danger of neglecting it, will, at any cost, devise means and opportunities of its fulfilment.

Once more: *pre-occupation of mind* may hinder the work. Under this head we may place *wandering thoughts*, and *the want of proper seriousness* for so solemn, so momentous an employment. Enough has been said already to show that the Christian's path heavenward is that of one passing through an enemy's country—an enemy bitterly opposed to his progress, and who would fain, at any onward step, destroy all his hopes, but that he is guarded by the Omnipotent from his malicious violence. And the more to discourage all spiritual pride, the more to magnify the Goodness and Tender Mercy, and Power of the Most High, the Christian is a soldier unfit to bear

these fatigues; he is faint and feeble, instead of being energetic and strong. The eye of his faith strives to keep in sight his Father, and his Father's Home, whither he is travelling; but he bears about with him a body of sin and death, whose weight he must ever feel, more or less heavily, every step he takes.

Such considerations as these, will explain the reason why the hindrances to his heart's peace exist, which we are now considering. Our thoughts are restless and wayward in their very nature. They are far too much attached to the old, unmortified, unrenewed man within us, to listen readily to the calls of the regenerate soul. They obey it as servants determined to thwart and tire out a master whom they hate. They grieve and distress us thus, however solemnly we may be employed. In moments when we would fain soar aloft, and experience, in all its blessedness, a life of Christian love and zeal, they hold us to the earth. And so, even as sin and Satan beset us in the season of self-

scrutiny, they are ever at hand to distract and weaken our impressions of spiritual things.

But our Compassionate Redeemer knows these infirmities. He does not remove the shackle from the spirit: He whispers to it—"My Grace is sufficient for thee." He discerns whether we are earnest in our attempts to recall them or not. If earnest but unsuccessful, He will bless us. If we are drawn away in willing captivity by our rebellious feelings without remonstrance, or resistance, to the utmost of our strength, the case will be very different. The work must not be abandoned because wandering thoughts are busy. Rest assured, that, should we be saved at the last, we shall learn there were many, many hours spent in devotional exercises on earth, again and again interrupted by our enemies, whom yet we attempted, in God's might, to repel, when we were "accepted in The Beloved," and not, as we despairingly feared, rejected.

It is the same apostle who has given utterance

to the following very different experiences—
“Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”* “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.”† And once more, “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me, only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.”‡ Can we doubt but that St. Paul was beset by wandering thoughts? Assuredly not. He was “a man of like passions” with ourselves. Only he gave no rein to them. As soon as he found they were drawing him away, he reminded them sternly of their duty—that

* Rom. vii. 24. † Gal. ii. 20. ‡ 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

they were called to serve a New Master, even the Lord Jesus Christ. And we then may, with him, hope for the "crown of righteousness," despite these inward foes, if we give no heed to them, and strenuously endeavour to recall them from their wanderings.

The want of proper seriousness for self-examination, is another sore trial over which the Christian often feels he has no control. Or even if he succeed in restoring partial seriousness, he will be disposed to look upon it as only a semblance, a mockery of the real. There may be no positive levity to annoy him in such a case. He may simply feel that the mood in which he commences the exercise is not one suited to the importance of matters affecting the salvation of the soul. He had been thinking, perhaps, only recently, of circumstances, innocent in themselves, attached to his ordinary daily life; and their interest has forestalled that of the anticipated communion with his past hours. Let him, then, be careful for the

future to shut out, as far as possible from a definite period of time before and after the religious exercise, all thoughts having no reference to the concerns of the soul. And let him not enter upon the work until he has previously prayed fervently for Grace to realize the Presence of God within him. If this be granted, the difficulty will be removed. And that perseverance will obtain the request is evident from those words, among many others, of the Faithful Promiser—"Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened."*

In a word, then, though the difficulties connected with self-examination were tenfold more numerous than they are, there would be nothing in them that ought to deter the

* Matt. vii. 7, 8.

earnest Christian from its regular practice. He is not required to combat them in his own strength; and what that is finite and created, however formidable, can stand against the Omnipotence of the Infinite Creator? Let him pray that all clouds may be dispelled from his spiritual vision, all darkness of foreboding from his heart, that he neither doubt nor fear. Within and without he shall meet with deadly foes, as long as he is in the body; but their time is short, their dominion over the saints overthrown. When the prophet's servant feared, as he beheld the forces of the king of Syria waiting to apprehend his master, the Lord, at the prophet's prayer, "opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw: and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."* And so, in all ages of the world, "they that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot

* 2 Kings vi. 17.

be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth, even for ever."*

* Psalm cxxv. 1, 2.

CHAPTER V.

LIMITS OF HUMAN ACCOUNTABILITY.

THE subject proposed to be discussed in this chapter is one of extreme difficulty, *not* because it involves questions difficult of solution in themselves, but because there is danger, in man's present state of lamentable declension from original righteousness, lest it should be misapprehended, and so work mischief in hearts, which, by nature, are ever predisposed to avoid, as far as is possible, all irksome duties, and to aim at the attainment of eternal salvation on the easiest possible terms.

It is necessary, then, to state first the reason of its discussion, and to give a few brief suggestions as to the spirit in which it may, if

God so bless it, be read, not only harmlessly, but to the soul's profit and consolation.

There are numerous instances of Christians sincerely devoted to their Lord, cheerful bearers of their cross, whose faith is fruitful and whose lives are ordered according to the rules of God's Holy Word, who are yet apt to suffer severe mental anguish through acutely sensitive feelings on certain points relating to their spiritual state. The higher eminence they gain of watchfulness, the more extensive view they have of the innate corruption ever working in their natures, and in those even of the holiest. And it is easily understood, that, exposed as man is, in this probationary state, to the wiles of the evil one, who "is a liar from the beginning," there will be occasions when the enemy, discerning in certain temperaments great earnestness combined with keen sensitiveness on peculiar points—points upon which their thoughts perhaps are ever dwelling, and from the consideration of which they are apt to derive a dark

and gloomy tinge, will adapt his attacks to the weaknesses so left open to him. Although he cannot read the abstract thoughts and intents of the heart, so as to see whether good or evil be concealed there, until by outward signs it becomes apparent, yet a mood of morbid melancholy, produced by the absence of clear-sightedness in the soul's vision, is likely to betray itself openly in so many ways, by word and deed, that one so sleeplessly active cannot fail to see this, and to make them occasions of offence if he can.

It is not possible for Christians to have too dark a view of their own natural vileness. There is no health in the best of us: the leprosy is rooted firmly within. But, besides that our hearts are the fountains of so much evil, Satan has at his command other stores of evil, to which we are *not* naturally predisposed; and when he would draw thick clouds over the believer's faith, he adopts that mode of doing so which seems to him least likely to fail. Although

he may feel that his hold upon a soul is weak and slippery,—as to his power of influencing its eternal state, still his very malice—a vice odious in man, and inconceivably so in a fiend—will lead him to persecute that soul with dark fears and presentiments, till God has rescued it from his influence altogether, by its removal hence. The poison of his lie thrust forth our first mother from Paradise, has tainted all her offspring with evil, and has given him eternal dominion over countless millions of the human family. He will haunt the Christian's closet of devotion, and still ply this tried and powerful weapon. If he cannot induce the object of his wiles to abandon the paths of holiness altogether, and plunge into those of recklessness of living, he will watch the peculiar tendencies of his hoped-for victim's heart or mind, and will still pour in the poison, even though he foresees its effect may be felt only in this life. If he cannot ruin a soul, he will, at all events, try to render it perfectly, continually wretched. And with many who yet,

after their separation from the body, will find themselves prostrate at their Redeemer's Feet in the Prepared Mansions, he succeeds only too fearfully.

These and subsequent remarks, then, are penned in the earnest prayerful hope that some such may, through their means, be disenthralled of this perpetual discomfort, and be able, in the Might of their Redeemer, to drive away their foe from the out-post he has held so long against them. Since his lying arts will constantly induce many true believers to attribute to themselves the commission, wholly or partially, of sins of which they may be really innocent, and to think their moral responsibility stretches beyond the limits God has assigned to it, it seems requisite, in a work meant to offer hope and comfort and encouragement in the closet, to study with all due caution, and with the aid of God's Blessing upon the more powerful exercise of faith, the question suggested by the heading of this chapter; and such question

may be thus stated : "What distinct boundaries exist between thoughts or actions for which we are accountable to God, and those for which we are not accountable ?"

Let us enter upon the discussion of our subject in a spirit of calm and temperate inquiry. And I would recommend that the reader should not enter farther into its consideration, until he has prayed fervently for clear powers of moral insight into its intricacies, and for Grace to bring him forth from them unharmed. If there be any to whom the Holy Spirit has given such happy discernment, as that the subject practically throws no obstacle in their way, and upon whom, therefore, the evil one has had, in these points of his attack, little or no power, it will, perhaps, be better that such should omit this chapter. At all events, let none suppose for a moment that it is meant to check them in the godly jealousy they may hitherto have exercised over themselves, and in their watchfulness against the snares of the

devil. It is intended for the encouragement of such as are ever at their post; not that their anxious caution may be relaxed, but that they "may not be afraid where no fear is," nor dismayed by dark and terrifying forebodings of the Judgment to come, forgetful of the apostle's assurance, that "there is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."*

It would not be possible to enumerate, by name, all those thoughts or actions for which we are *not* morally responsible; because they vary, as different characters vary, in their constitutional bias or tendencies. And it would be most unscriptural to lay down distinctions between sins taken in the abstract, so as to mark out those for which we are or are not accountable. God's Forgiveness, through the Atoning Efficacy of the Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, has power to wash out all stains

* 1 John, iv. 18.

of guilt which the soul could possibly contract, with one single exception. And therefore no sin could be named, save that against the Holy Ghost, which has such power over the soul tempted into the commission of it, as to effect its ruin, provided this precious Forgiveness be interposed.

And what difficulties exist in the way of obtaining this Forgiveness? None—to the heart knowing the power of a penitent, loving, operative faith. Such boundaries, then, as *do* exist between thoughts or actions for which we *are* responsible, and those for which we *are not* responsible, must be sought for in the soul alone. Repentance, and faith—proving its life by a steadfast pursuit, on the part of the sinner offering it to his Saviour—of the path of obedience for the future, at once, through the virtue of the Gospel Covenant, separate that for which we *are not* accountable from that for which we *are* accountable.

He who has grieved, again and again, or

the power of the evil one's assaults against his soul, knows full well what is meant by sin injected or suggested to the thoughts by that arch-fiend, as distinct from sin proceeding from the human heart as its original fountain. Many practical believers, in the midst of their bright hopes of eternal joys, have frequently been startled, and thrown back into gloom again, as they have found themselves in the presence of dark and blasphemous impulses. They had yearned, perhaps, just before such evil and unwelcome visitants arrived, after a holy walk with God,—had succeeded in assuring their hearts that, notwithstanding very much innate impurity and spiritual weakness,—love of God, strivings after heavenly things, pious feelings were uppermost within them.

But even when the glow of holy, but humble and grateful satisfaction had scarcely been kindled within them by the Holy Spirit, the foe has stolen secretly upon them from some quarter whence they had never looked for his attacks.

They had hoped that every outpost was securely guarded. With the ease, however, possessed by him in his nature as a spirit, "the prince of the power of the air" has glided craftily in, and has aimed this cruel blow at their peace. Perceiving that Conscience is on the watch to guard the soul from falling into such snares as its natural and indwelling sins would suggest that he should lay, he adopts another method of proceeding. He insinuates to such believers their participation in the guilt of dark and horrible thoughts, drawn from the depths of his vile nature—lower than the lowest depths of iniquity into which they had ever consciously descended. Or he causes them to possess the memory of their darkest transgressions, in the hope of inducing them to feel that their contrition for them, and God's consequent Forgiveness, was a fond fancy of the heated imagination. Aroused and appalled, they ask each one, "Can it be so with me? Have I mistaken the natures of faith and penitence—

Have I been given over to believe a lie? Is it possible that, wicked as I am, I could ever have possessed before such ideas as these? Does part of my heart remain yet unsearched? What shall I do? Whither shall I turn? Are these sinful thoughts really my own? If so, I must be very hard-hearted, very impenitent; for I cannot think myself guilty of them. "If they are *not* my own, how can I tell they have not poisoned my soul? How shall I escape the bitter, bitter suffering they cause me? Does God really visit me with His Mercy, or am I a reprobate?"

Ah! when Satan has drawn such a believer aside from his confidence of faith, and has left him at the bottom of so dark a pit as this, to mourn over his vileness, he will look on from above him with malicious triumph. But is there really any ground for despair because of these more violent assaults? Oh no! "The Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from *all*

sin.”* Feel this, poor sinner, and angels shall soon bear thee up from thy dark despair, and place thee in the Light of Gospel Day, where the foe attacked thee, and whence thou shalt find he has fled at the sound of those few words cast in his teeth out of the Book of Life, and at the sight of his Conqueror hastening down to thy rescue.

If thou wouldst be safe, take the whole temptation, such as it is, to “thy Father which is in heaven.” Spread out the record of thy misery, even as Hezekiah spread out the letter of the blasphemous Sennacherib before the Lord. Mourn for love of thy Redeemer over thy real sins, but fear not to excuse thyself in all deep humility to Him from sins hurled against thee by the enemy, to which thou feelest thyself to be a stranger. Pray that all short-sightedness and weak self-distrust in thy faith may be taken away, that so thou mayest detect the lie, when

* 1 John i. 7.

“the accuser of the brethren” taunts thee unjustly, and be able, not only to know and be sorry for a sin really committed by thee, but also with all lowly gratitude to discern and to own the gift of some heavenly grace, when the Giver of all good has with such bounty refreshed thy spirit.

Mere neighbourhood to spiritual evil cannot involve us in that evil’s pollution, if we take care to flee from it, or to raise our voices in abhorrence of the crime, and in solemn dissuasives to those engaged in it. It is to be feared that many Christians have so little looked into the Divine purpose in their creation and their mission here, as to fall into grave mistakes on this point. They are willing enough to accept the first assertion as an entire truth in itself, but too often, in their practice, reject its exceptional qualifications. Let not the same mistake delude the Christian, when tempted by the Evil One, to unjust self-accusation. The taunt is not to be lightly

repelled. It must have due consideration, and be well tested, so as that if there be even the least particle of truth in it, it may be detected, and the soul confess its participation in the sin thus brought against it.

Satan will bring against the Christian *not false* accusations only, but *true* ones, in a much exaggerated form. Let him not fail, then, to search upon his knees before God for the portion of truth—however small it may be to his human anticipation—hidden in that mass of calumnious exaggeration. If accused by his bitter and sleepless foe of having committed the unpardonable sin, let him not too rashly enter upon an entire self-justification in the matter. If he has never gone so far as to reject all sacred truth, in the very face of its clearest evidences, has he not often brought the weak, unsteady glow-worm light of carnal reason and sophistry to the examination of some doctrine, which, in all loving faith, he should have to his heart, and made the root or the ?

tion of his practice? Although from the fact that he has recently enjoyed sweet Presences of God in his heart, he may safely conclude that, as yet, the Holy Comforter has not forsaken him, has there been no apparently trifling thought, word, or work, in which he has grieved the Spirit?

Satan is on the watch for the first appearance of even slipping or stumbling, that he may build, upon what little truth he can get, the superstructure of his lie. Some sin may have been committed by us, in past years, from whose guilt we asked not to be cleansed. Does any such start up in the memory of the reader—one that blotted the page of even his earliest childhood? If so, let him think over it, and seek to remember whether Satan has not woven that single thread of truth into the web of his, in other respects, lying accusations. Our spiritual need requires of us that we should take Memory for our guide into the darkness of past hours, and, by

her lamp, discover our stumbling-places. And because Memory is, at best, only failing and weak, it is no less necessary that, in every confession of sin to God, we should supplicate His Pardon of all guilt, great or small, in our erring human estimation, known or unknown, recollected or forgotten, into which, at any time since our birth, we may have fallen.

It is clear, then, that, without the exercise of careful reflection and memory, it will be impossible to tell whether we are accountable, in any degree, for the guilty thoughts injected into our hearts by the evil one, or not; and that such process of close mental research will greatly help us in marking out the limits of human accountability, in particular cases, affecting our own eternal interests.

There are, perhaps, cases in which the soul of the believer is so hurt by these fiery-poisoned arrows of the evil one, that, in the extremity of anguish, he forgets to reach forth his hand for the healing Balm of Gilead near him, and so

allows the wound to rankle and fester, as one shunning or despairing of relief. There is a false humility in some hearts which is productive of perpetually recurring discomfort. The same Christian, who is timid as to close self-scrutiny, will often be fainting and prostrate after the hotter assaults of his spiritual enemy. Rather than go into all counts in the indictment brought against him, that he may assure himself of his guilt or innocence in the matter, he will act as though he had in all respects been accused justly, will fall into dark and dreadful forebodings, and hurry himself into vague and unpremeditated confession as to evil with which, after all, his conscience only slightly, if at all, upbraids him. He has, perhaps, a wholesome dread of the self-righteous spirit, and strongly impressed views as to the heart's natural corruption. These feelings, indispensable in themselves to progress in the spiritual life, but needing union with a cheerful, hopeful faith, and with acquired self-knowledge to prevent declensions, have led

him to mistake his duty. Such a character needs the word of caution.

Just as God pays little heed to that confession which is unaccompanied by deeply seated penitence for sin, and a sorrowing remembrance of each particular fall, so we may be assured He does not ask us to put ourselves without the pale of His Consolations in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to distress ourselves with dark visions of retribution, when a little longer delay, and careful self-examination before approaching Him, would have shown us we were yet living in His Favour. Let us not act, in these days when the warm, bright Sun of Righteousness shines cloudlessly above our heads, as we should have done within sound and sight of the thunderings and lightnings of Mount Sinai. Once we should have been slain by Satan's less poisoned weapons. Now, "if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, The Righteous One. He is The Propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Then, we ought to cherish

worketh death," but the "peace of mind which passeth all understanding," the "hope which is as an anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast," the "joy unspeakable and full of glory," which no man can take from us.

"Strengthen then the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees." Let us seek manfully and fearlessly to know if we *have* committed that particular sin which bows us down into the dust. If we *are* guilty there is pardon and peace for us close at hand: if we are innocent, our hearts have clouds and gloom within them such as the Lord Jesus Christ came down to dispel.

Clouds and gloom, without intermission, on the face of one born to the heavenly inheritance! Unceasing fears and mental agony for those who are travelling Zionward! Anticipations of judgment on the part of those who are earnest in seeking to battle down the evil within and around them, in the Might of the Indwelling God! No; these things

cannot be. If it were always night here, when would be the foretaste of Eternal Day? If the spirit were always here to be clothed in the robe of penitence, when would be its festival hours of faith and hope? The wilderness of this world has here and there its well-watered spots: it is our own fault if our pilgrim-feet tread ever on thorns and briars. Well, indeed, it is for us to receive chastisement at the Hands of God: to own, to mourn over, to depart from our *real* sins.

But need we put ourselves under the scorpion-lash of Satan? There is no mercy tempering such chastening as this, no "peaceable fruits of righteousness" does it work out. We may ever be in darkness and dejection, unless we seek to know more of God's Loving-kindness—more of our real graces, and real failings. There are whisperings everywhere among us—in the Scriptures, in Creation, in our own fearful and wonderful framework—of the coming reign of pure millennial joy. Why then should we always be sad and solitary? Let us take, in all pious

tentment and thankfulness, the cup our Beloved Redeemer has placed in our hands. The bitter ingredient is no more than is requisite for each soul's eternal health. If, in some cups, it is more, in others less abundant, it is because individual need requires such variation. And if the Hand of God put in the sorrow, all is well. "It is the Lord : let Him do what seemeth Him good."*

* 1 Samuel iii. 18.

CHAPTER VI.

BENEFITS AND COMFORTS OF SELF-EXAMINATION.

IF self-examination be rough and miry ground over which we too often drag on heavily, there are green pastures and still waters on the other side. We have sought to look its difficulties in the face, we have seen clearly that our way to the Heavenly City lies through its toilsome paths ; and now we are to talk of the joys whispered into our ears by the Saviour, and our angelic guardians, as awaiting those who will not in waywardness travel onward by another road.

Who, that loves to wander back to the earlier days of his chequered life, when he received his first indelible religious impressions through

sweet ministry of parents or other tender guardians of his youth, does not love also to recall, if he may, the earnestness nursed by his unquestioning trustfulness in those who taught him, with which he listened to their lessons? So softly descended the Holy Dove upon the heart not yet hardened by contact with the world, so oft those lessons recurred to the memory that seemed to hold them as its best earthly treasure—or rather as a heavenly one committed to the keeping of an earthly vessel! And when the first fit of boyish waywardness grieved the Holy One, and for the time caused His departure from the temple in which He had been dwelling,—when, for a time he could appear outwardly to care little for the mother's tear, or the father's look of sadness, so strongly ruled the evil one within him, does he not remember the gradually increasing might of his better feeling, that brought him face to face with his sin, and drew forth the silent tears more and more copiously, until at last he threw the bur-

den from his breast, and asked forgiveness? Restless and miserable as he was, and disposed even to rebel, as Conscience taunted him with his errors, was not all forgotten in the gush of happiness that followed? Did he not even receive strength, when caught up to his parents' arms, to tell them that he was glad his inward monitor had, through God's help, brought him out of the snare.

"Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."* Such are the Saviour's Words, teaching us, if we would progress in the spiritual life, to copy the pattern of our more guileless, more impressible, more ingenuous childhood. And if it has been a pious one, what may we not learn? What inward strength may we not gain from this course? The work of self-examination then was borne with for the sake of its subsequent peace. And shall it not be so with us now?

* Mark x. 15.

Though the fever-heat of our passions may be *now* more difficult to allay,—though there is so much in the world that we feel has such terrible power to enchain and to keep us back from God,—though the warm glow of our early piety is gone, and a flickering, unsteady flame has taken its place,—though, year by year, we have liked less and less to talk with our past hours, and have less and less realized the bliss following the exercise when properly engaged in;—yet, let us seek once more, in our daily life, to do as we did of old. On our knees, in the solitude of the closet, let the search into ourselves be keen, active, and faithful. Let us not heed the present pain, but look forward to the future pleasure. Our Father in Heaven waits for us, the angels wait to exult over our return; and, in the spirit-world, or nearer still to us, though unseen, those dear ones also watch anxiously the tumult within; but the scrutiny must be well over before the words of pardon and peace

can sink into our earth-stained hearts. The conflict is harder *now*, but the joy succeeding it is the same; only that joy now allures us less to pass through the ordeal, because the world has loosened our hold upon Heaven; distrust has usurped the place of our childhood's faith: apathy and cold unconcern creep in too often, where the gush of our childhood's love was full and free in its current before.

Oh how hard it is through life to retain the guileless earnestness of a pious childhood! But, surely, the Saviour must be obeyed, if we would see Him as He is, and reign with Him hereafter.

Habitual self-examination through life, has a tendency so far to keep us "unspotted from the world," as to *preserve within us much of our childhood's sensitiveness to good impulse*. And it paves the way to our realization of that precious verse: "The Spirit Itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." This is, surely, all the Christian

desires to know. It cannot be but that, in his waywardness and proneness almost unconsciously to sink into evil ways, he should often grieve his Heavenly Father and the members of that Celestial family to which he belongs; but how blessed is it to hear within him, after each season of godly sorrow, the Utterances of the Holy Comforter, telling him, that the link that holds him to the heavenly circle is not yet broken; that, though wayward often, he is a forgiven and accepted son still!

The real Christian longs for abiding evidences of his safety; he is thankful for the sorrow that has brought him chastened and low to the foot of the Cross; because, as he knelt there, he knew from the sweet calm within, that "The Lord had returned to His temple." "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost,"* asks the apostle. He, the Spirit of all purity, cannot abide within the precincts of a polluted shrine.

1 Cor. vi. 19.

And just as a room left from week to week unswept, cannot fail to become, in time, full of dust and uncleanness, so is it with the human heart. Not, then, merely, does self-scrutiny precede the return of the Comforter to its recesses; but, if the work be neglected, there can be no surer proof that the Heavenly Guest is not within us. And if He, our Omnipotent Helper, be away, He with Whom the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are One, all the warmth of Godliness must be cold, all its former life dead. If, then, we would see that our title-deeds to the possession of the heavenly inheritance are safe, if we would know that we have not slept and lost them by the way, it is imperative the sacred closet-duty should be thoroughly attended to, of which this little volume treats.

God will Himself give us all that is requisite for its efficient performance. He will nerve the will to cling to the duty in all steadfastness of purpose; He will nerve the mind to recall its

wandering thoughts. He will cause the heart to heave with no feigned sorrow over its transgressions. He will strengthen in us hatred of the world, the flesh, and the devil; will pray within us, and "make intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered;" will scatter the holy dew of prayerfulness over the life; will glorify the Lord Jesus by bringing us ever to His Feet; "will guide us" when we doubt, whether as to doctrine or the nature of inward experiences, "into all truth;" will speak to us of the glorious secrets of Eternal Life, which He shall hear from the Father and the Son, with Whom He is One; and will "show us things to come." Day by day He will come and abide with us from morning until night, if we ask it of Him; will reveal our state of preparedness for heaven; will come to us in the night season with gifts of holy thoughts and desires; will bear our spirits up through the darkness of the night of death; will "raise us up at the last day." For while He quickens our souls with

spiritual life, He gives us thereby an earnest and a pledge of His Office to raise us to immortality.

But another benefit of self-examination is, that *it strengthens moral hardihood in the resistance of evil for the future.* The soul, fresh from its holy influences, will be anxious to retain their good impressions. It will have found the duty painful and humiliating, will have been brought to feel keenly the ingratitude involved in its declensions, will have experienced the sore trouble of just self-accusation, and the encouraging comfort of just self-acquittal. On each occasion of faithful perseverance in the work, the unspeakable Brightness of God's Mercies in Christ Jesus, and the terrible darkness of His Threatenings against transgressors, will reveal themselves to it in a more powerful manner. The sweet visions of bliss it will thus receive, and the memories of the inward monitor's wounding reproofs, will go with it into subsequent contests.

And great must be the consequent gain of this. The Christian will not be so likely to stumble. He will see the necessity of examining well the ground over which he has to tread. He will know the features and many of the disguises of his foe. He will find many evil tendencies within him weakened, if not subdued; and when again brought face to face with a strong temptation, he will be more likely to think, not of that temptation's pleasant-looking fruit which he had found turned to ashes on his lips, but of the hindrance offered by his former falls to his true peace at the close of the day.

But true moral hardihood is not that impulse only which leads us to meet boldly the enemy on equal ground: it urges us also to turn out of the way of an enemy, a contest with whom would be likely to be accompanied with disastrous results to ourselves. In the believer's case, there is frequently more true courage in fleeing from a danger than in pushing his way headlong into it. His cha-

racter may have many weak, paralysed parts, which God does not call upon him rashly to expose to danger. Not but that the Grace of God can restore a palsied limb of the soul, and make it whole, even as the others. But such is the case only when the strongest possible faith has preceded the cure. An Augustine may have had strength imparted to him, after his conversion, sufficient to defy all the allurements that once led him captive. But would it be safe, would it not be rash and dangerous for very many believers to tempt again, in so needlessly open a manner, the force of an enemy that has so often laid us prostrate at its feet?

Let the reader examine his own weak points, and judge for himself. The Holy Spirit in-works in human weakness. Let due heed be taken, lest, in moments of self-confidence, He desert that weakness, and it sink lower than before. Satan will often try, if he can, to induce the newly strengthened believer to dare the battle again with a particular sin. But

let him not listen to such suggestions for a moment. God gives him strength only just sufficient for each need. He may have given him strength enough to flee—not sufficient to contend again as yet. But the Voice of the Holy Spirit, speaking in close self-examination, will impart to him such self-knowledge, as that he shall soon learn how best to proceed in such cases.

And while self-examination promotes that tenderness of conscience, which is, as it were, a vigilant warder, to warn us of an enemy's approach, and a trustworthy guide along a path grievously full of pitfalls, *it furnishes also the means of arriving at true humility.* The real Christian's just views of his sins are humbling, as tending to show him how much the gross and earthly elements in his spiritual nature outweigh the heavenly. It must humble him to feel, that in his holiest hours, and when he is most sensible of the Witness of the Spirit within him, he is no better than a brand

snatched from the burning. He cannot but feel humbled, when he, the creature of life's little day, whose breath may, at any moment be recalled, is brought, evening after evening, and at other stated solemn seasons, so closely into the Presence of the Infinite Creator, Who is "from everlasting to everlasting." He remembers "the years of the right hand of the Most Highest;" he surveys the wonders of creation, above, below, and around him; and, sinking down upon his knees, exclaims—"Lord what is man that THOU art mindful of him? and the son of man, that THOU visitest him?" The Christian is humbled, after having called up before him, and reviewed in retrospect his few graces. How scant, how sin-soiled, how feeble, how difficult of culture they are! And as he blesses his God for the few that he may have discovered working in his heart, and which he fails not to take account of among his daily mercies, he is lost in wonder at the Infinite Condescension of Him who has consented to accept

so base a return of affection and adoration for the pardon and salvation of the soul. He looks upon himself, at best, as a fig-tree plentifully covered with leaves, but exhibiting little and meagre fruit. And if, in a moment of grateful satisfaction, he is dwelling upon his possession of some Grace better than ordinary, or upon some incident in which he has been permitted to exemplify his love for Christ, and his zeal for souls in some stronger way, he remembers that he has nothing which he has not received—that faith, hope, love, penitence, all once were strangers to him, all are heavenly plants striking root with difficulty into “strange unkindly soil.”

Who can be humble *without* self-examination? Pride is seated more or less in the depths of every heart. It is the very leprosy-spot of the Fall. It is the mark of Cain branded upon every brow; which, to the very last pulse, shall remain there in more or less distinctness of outline, revealing to the heavenly host “the Love of Christ which

passeth knowledge," the Unfathomable Mercies of the Holy Tri-Une God,—and firing them to strike their golden harps to higher strains of sacred song, as they behold how base and lost a rebel can be pardoned—pardoned, too, not on his own request, but because the Sovereign stooped to offer forgiveness, and to introduce him hereafter into their pure celestial company.

And while, in this way, self-examination tends to humble the true Christian as he gains deeper and deeper insight into his natural vileness, and into the Mercies of the Most High, it keeps him *prepared against sudden death*. Who, of Adam's race, that kneels down to pray by his bed-side at night, can confidently assure himself of another day-dawn upon earth? He may imagine, as to physical health, that all is well, and yet the seeds of some organic disease may be lurking, unknown to him, in his constitution, which, without a moment's warning, may hurry him into eternity. "At even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing,

or in the morning," the lamp of mortal life may be put out, and the allotted season of Grace come to its end.

For the reader to say that such a circumstance is not likely to happen in his own case, is to assume a knowledge of the Secret Counsels of the Most High, which are known only to the Wonderful, the Counsellor Himself. Self-examination, then, is an act of obedience to our Blessed Lord's Command—"Watch :"—it forms an eminent characteristic of "that good and wise servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching." What more blessed exercise could precede his entrance into eternity than this, and the duties allied with it? When, therefore, the believer thus summons any portion of his past life before him, let him seek to concentrate his energies upon it, as though the opportunity of its review were afforded him for the last time. Let him not suffer a day to pass by without remembering the uncertain dura-

tion of his sojourn here. Let him mourn over his sins, think gratefully of his rescue from past perils, magnify God's Love in the redemption and continual pardon of his soul, form holy resolves in the Might of the Sanctifier, employ himself in sweet meditation upon God, and prepare, in all respects, to meet Him as a "poor pensioner on the bounties of an hour" should do.

It is through Self-examination that *eternal truths become more and more impressed upon the heart, in all the vividness of their reality.* Nearer views of heaven are thus vouchsafed, because God reveals His glories to the soul in proportion to the exercise of its faith. How many seem, day by day, to subsist upon mere barren sentiment alone as to great religious verities! They are apt to speak before others in vague and general terms, and in a superficial manner, about religion, whose power to encourage, to console, to bless, to act as an antidote to the ills of life, they feel little. And

even as they so speak, their consciences cannot but accuse them of pretended enthusiasm with regard to that which, yet, is by no means with them the one thing needful.

But to the Christian, thus diligent and fervent in his work of preparation for eternity, God and his conscience speak more and more audibly as the work progresses: heaven glows in warmest, brightest colours: earth's disappointments become more and more light and shadowy, and its bereavements come with less crushing weight upon one who has learned to look forward in confident, patient hope, to re-unions above. The hope which, with others, is but too often a feeling, fitful, unsatisfying, and visionary, becomes, with him, joyful expectation: the faith, which, with others, exists in name only, and is destitute of fruit, is to him the eye by which he sees his heavenly home, the very heart through which healthful pulses flow from Christ, who is his Life. Applying to himself,

day by day, the tests given in Holy Scripture, he walks onward with no wavering step: he makes not religion a mere matter of convenience, but esteems it as the very life-blood coursing through his veins. His gaze is ever in the direction of the everlasting hills, and it is the close and earnest self-scrutiny of his retirement that enables him to ascertain whether he is walking towards them quickly or slowly.

Religious impressions are too often obliterated from the heart of the mere professor, as letters carved in the sands are washed out by the influx of the tide. There are a few convulsive throbs and starts, and then their action has ceased. But with the careful, earnest Christian, they become a power, propelling the heart and the hand to act in obedience to God's Holy Dictates:—a power they would never have attained had not the soul listened to them as to the Divine Message, and set itself, in all sacred love and singleness of aim to

fulfil them. Upon a *reality*, only, could a labour so close, so earnest, so self-denying as that involved in self-examination be founded: none would otherwise undertake it. It would not, indeed, be going too far to assert, that, at the same time in which the soul of man accepts religion as a reality, it resorts to the duty we are speaking of, as feeling insecure without it. Let, then, those who attend means of Grace, but omit this duty in their hurried devotional exercises at home, ask themselves if they have, indeed, believed *at all*, or if, at the last great day, they would have it said of them that they had "believed in vain." The mind may be unwilling to confess unbelief; but, when God asks, "Believest thou?" what is the answer returned—not by the thoughts, or by the lips, but by the *life*?

SELF-EXAMINATION.

SECTION II.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION.



PRACTICAL APPLICATION.



CHAPTER I.

PROPER SEASONS FOR SELF-EXAMINATION.

IF the perusal of the foregoing chapters has been Divinely blessed to the reader, he will be anxious to make early practical use of such suggestions as have been given. And when once the resolution has been made, in God's strength, to test his spiritual life in future, in spite of every difficulty that lies in his way, it is time to go with him to the closet-door, giving him, meanwhile, further practical hints referring to

the mode of conducting the process recommended, and heads of enquiry to help him in his solemn search. This requisition of the subject, will, it is hoped, be met in the subsequent chapters.

While yet we stand together on the threshold of the room where so deeply solemn a scene between God and the soul is to take place, it cannot, reader be too emphatically urged upon your attention, that you should beware of supposing the exercise itself has merit in the sight of the Most Holy. Take it up, then, with no wrong impression. It has no virtue in itself. You might spend years as a recluse in the wilderness, clothed in sackcloth, and spreading ashes upon your head, and discover after all at the close of life, that "a deceived heart had turned you aside." There is no virtue in any human ordinance, so that of itself it can take out even the least colour from sin's dark dye. Disallow this, and you dishonour the Priest and the Sacrifice on Calvary: you make it to appear

that one ordinance is so perfect in itself as not to have needed the outpouring of the Redeemer's Precious Blood.

Self-examination is only a *channel* of the Grace of God. It is only a *medium*, through which the Blood of the Lamb may be poured upon the souls of earnest-hearted seekers after God,—one, indeed, of the most blessed media,—but such, after all, is its only true character. And hence flows a thought most consolatory in its nature to the true Christian, when he feels how inadequate are his powers of insight into self to make the scrutiny as comprehensive as it ought to be. The Virtue of that Great Propitiatory Sacrifice, once for all completed on Calvary, will atone for all deficiencies and imperfections in the exercise itself, if the heart, engaged in it be absorbed in its employment.

Self-knowledge is, on earth, only most superficial. We cannot see ourselves as we are seen of God: many trains of thought which betray

us almost unconsciously into action, develop themselves so noiselessly, so craftily, as it were, as partially or wholly to escape observation ; and so the heart's answers cannot be full and satisfactory on all points. But in this duty, as in all others we are commanded to perform, we must put forth our best endeavours, in all their human weakness ; and our faith must lead us to see that, with such sacrifices, notwithstanding their insufficiencies, God is well pleased.

CHAPTER II.

OF SELF-EXAMINATION EVERY EVENING.

LET self-examination be a work appointed for *every evening*. “In the day, from hour to hour, throughout all his varied occupations, lie a man’s great responsibilities, his duties, his work which he has to fulfil for Christ; and all that space from the morning to the evening, from his up-rising to his time of rest, constitute in an especial sense. his life; it is the space most to be accounted for, in which his spiritual state takes its shape one way or the other, in which his character is made and moulded, changed and modified, whether after the pattern of Christ or after the fashion of the world.”

And the space even of a single day

witnesses the bringing against the soul of so many temptations, and so many falls and declensions from the right path; so many roughnesses of temper which are contrary to the Spirit of Christ—so many hard thoughts of others, so much unkindness and bitterness of feeling, so many hasty and thoughtless words calculated to wound the hearts of our brethren, such forgetfulness of our moral responsibility, such indolence of purpose, and procrastination in things Divine, such gross instances of neglect as to our bounden duty and service to Almighty God, such fits of worldliness, such uprisings within of carnal and spiritual pride,—that if the heart come not at least as frequently as this to a stand, and test itself on all these points, the Christian character will become weaker daily, and many many sins will remain still on record against us.

The evil one makes much better use of our active waking hours, in seeking by little and little to loosen our hold upon heavenly

thoughts and cares, that so we may gradually sink under his dominion, than we do to train ourselves for God and an eternity of being. It is owing to this constant unwearied activity of good and evil, within and around us, that we must be either making progress or going backward in the Christian course.

Close watchfulness, every moment, would reveal to us that, in our pilgrimage heavenward, we are too much like persons walking over slippery ground, who so frequently take almost as many steps backward as forward, and sometimes stumble and fall, to their serious inconvenience or hurt. The walk by faith stretches over the moments and hours of the daily life. There is no movement at all in those fitful and inconstant moods when, because God has stricken us, we take up our Bible or some religious book for a brief half hour, and then rest satisfied with ourselves, and convinced that we have done our duty. And yet it is fearful to think how many, calling th

selves Christians, act in this way, who feel as relieved when the self-imposed work is over, and as ready to return to their old course of life again—as the horse, freed from the restraint of the bridle, is prepared at once to enjoy his own uncontrolled movements in the pasture.

Shorter periods, then, of self-examination serve for the gradual correction of our known besetting sins, as well as of all in our conduct that at all militates against the Spirit of Christ. The tree falls at last, after many well-directed strokes; but these are incessant, not few and far between. And so the tree of our sinful nature, whose branches are of growth so rapid, and bear evil fruit so plentifully, may have those branches one by one lopped off, and itself be felled at last, through faith in the Redeemer's Blood blessing the axe of self-examination, and prayer, and watchfulness; but its roots will still remain firmly imbedded in the heart, and will bid defiance to all human efforts to eradicate them. And most merciful are the counsels of the Crea-

tor, in ordering that these should be hidden, that no man should be able to read the thoughts of his fellow ; for had we this mutual insight into each other's characters, the very holiest among us would hide his head ; and the force of good example, so powerful an agent in training others for heaven, would be utterly destroyed.

It may serve to give a general idea as to the nature of the subjects that should come within the compass of each evening's examination, to append a few questions, which it is hoped will be suggestive of others. Each individual will best frame such enquiries for himself, as knowing best the secret tendencies of his own heart. Let them not be hurriedly answered, but let love for Christ constrain us to obtain as full a survey of ourselves as possible, that we may prove our active willingness to bring every thought into obedience to Him.

1. What were my thoughts during the night-watches? Did I take any holy text or story as food for meditation to my pillow? H. A. . . .

reflections suggested by them influenced my conduct for good, during the past day?

2. Did I think *first* of God on awaking?

3. Did I try to feel His Goodness, as exhibited in my preservation through that sleep and darkness, wherein, doubtless, the souls of so many passed away to their great account? What have I done this day for God, to prove my gratitude for my safety?

4. Was my morning prayer contrite, grateful, fervent? Did I feel humbled, as a vile sinner who is but dust and ashes ought to feel, before the Holy and Eternal God? Or was my prayer a weariness to me—hurried, shallow, formal, lifeless? Did I pray for the sake merely of satisfying my conscience, or from a deep sense of need, a thirst after holiness, a real feeling after God?

5. Did I remember my besetting sins at the beginning of my prayer, and beseech God that “my strong sins might this day grow weaker, and my weak graces stronger?”

6. Did I feed my soul with a portion, if only a verse, of God's Holy Word as a safeguard against temptation, and fretfulness of spirit under the trials of the day.

7. Did I remember to pray for my spiritual guides, for all in affliction, for wilful sinners, and for the heathen?

8. What desires have I felt this day for the coming of the Redeemer's Kingdom.

9. Have I felt any keen hatred of sin to-day?

10. Whom do I feel I most love?

11. What fruits of my love to God have been evident in my walk this day?

12. Have I been careful to follow the Spirit of Christ in all lowliness and meekness, charity and forbearance towards others?

13. What are my notions as to the forgiving spirit? Have I animosities against any, or feelings which I am unwilling to *call* animosities, but which really *are* so? Am I conscientiously convinced, that I have myself given no just cause of offence to those who may be estranged from me?

14. How have I borne with unpleasant interruptions, frustrations of previously laid plans, disappointments, and crosses of similar nature?

15. Have I sought to make practical application of instructions received at Church last Sunday?

16. Am I living so as not to be afraid of participating unworthily of the Holy Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood, should I have occasion to go to a Church where it may be administered unexpectedly.

17. Have I been devout in the conduct of family prayer to-day?

18. Can I think of any instances of carelessness in the control of myself and my household, according to God's Holy Word?

18. Have I passed over evil in others unbuked?

20. Do I feel afraid to die, should it please Almighty God to deny to me the light of another day here below?

CHAPTER III.

OF SELF-EXAMINATION DURING LENT, ETC.

It is, surely, not too much to ask of the pious Christian, who loves the Redeemer in spirit and in truth, that as his chief joy and peace flow from the Cross, so he should spend a short period in each year in sorrowing with his once crucified Lord. This he should do, not from a mere cold sense of duty alone, but from the dictates of holy spiritual love. He looks forward in sweet anticipation of reigning with Him when the general restitution of all things shall have arrived ; should he refuse, in a more special manner, to suffer with Him now ? How will the joy of casting down his crown at that

Blessed One's Feet in the prepared mansions, be enhanced by the remembrance, that he sought, while on earth, to enter a little into His Grief, and to mourn unfeignedly over the sins which caused Him to undertake and to accomplish the Great Work of man's redemption !


We test the strength and reality of our love for an earthly object, by our feelings during temporary separation from that object. If one of the family circle, long loved and cherished, is drawn from the sheltering embrace of home in time of war, to fill up some responsible post in his country's army or navy, and years are expected to intervene before his return ;—do they who are left behind, the hoary-headed father and mother, the brothers and sisters upon whose hearts the moment of his departure has rested ever since it took place, with a weight peculiarly heavy and still new, recur at stated seasons only, to their absent one, and then content themselves with just a little formal conversation respecting him,

into which the heart little enters? Does he not early enter into their thoughts morning after morning? Are there not gatherings around the fireside-glow at the twilight-hour, and in the quiet evenings, and moments when, though the faces of all may be turned abstractedly towards the fire, their thoughts are with the absent son and brother? His birthday occurs; is he out of their thoughts that day? Some other anniversary comes round, which has long been connected with some incident in the life of him who is away; is not that incident commonly discussed again and again? Is it not, if it be a pleasant one, looked at in every possible light, as though it had only recently occurred? Was it necessary, that before that son and brother left his home, he should enjoin his relatives not to forget him, to think sometimes of olden days when as yet they were all together, to give up an hour or two twice or thrice a week to conversation respecting him?

Assuredly not; their talk of him would be spontaneous, not forced. And if, at last, the moment of re-union should arrive, and he should enter beneath his father's roof once more, what effect would those countless conversations and thoughts have upon their reception of him? Would not the meeting be one inexpressibly more cordial than if there had been among them few thoughts of the absentee, and those forced and soon dismissed to make way for those more welcome? And the reason is, briefly, this. His image had been seated in their hearts; they had meditated and spoken of him as though he were near them; they had had many restless longings for his return, as feeling a vacuum, a sense of incomplete happiness, an anxious foreboding of perils, and even of entire separation in this world; and the sight of the dear face again, would fill up the vacuum, restore the missed happiness, dispel the anxiety, make all things as of old.

And for what purpose were these home-affections planted in our natures? That we might know, by their guidance, how to love the Lord Jesus Christ, and how to dwell earnestly and with deep interest upon His finished Work on Calvary; that our observance of Lent might be loving, not formal, replete with living thoughts, real tears, spontaneous outbursts of indignation against sin, such as the Ear alone of God can hear.

With many Christians, Lent is a season of sadness and gloom; but in how few cases is the sorrow such as its associations are meant to inspire? Its restraints are saddening—saddening, because many submit to them unwillingly, and would fain escape them if their religious feelings would allow them so to do. The sorrow of Lent is but too often a counterfeit or a shadow of the real sorrow to which it ought to give rise. It does not begin in the heart, but in the head. “It is not that it is respectable, it is right to if-



denial during this time." So reason many. And such, perhaps, will attend the week-day Litanies and the evening lecture, and there think their duty ends. But oh, what answer could such persons return, if they were asked, "What think ye of Christ?" The Lord's forty days' fast; the, to Him, bitter anguish of so close contact with the Evil One, the *unknown* depth of His wilderness-agonies; these subjects are prominent during Lent. Could they not, then, do more than this, if they were to try? Could they not descend into deeper thoughts about sin; could they not strive, for very love's sake, to make their closets scenes of earnestness, more (humanly speaking) like His of whom it is said:—

"Cold mountains, and the midnight air,
Witness'd the fervour of His Prayer.
The desert His temptations knew:
His conflict and His victory too?"

Just as periods of self-examination, recurring at short intervals, serve for the *gradual* correc-

tion of sinful propensities, so longer periods, when the heart should take a wider range in its subjects of meditation, will the better enable the pious Christian to test the increase or diminution of his spiritual stature, since the last longer period set apart for more especial scrutiny. If we daily live in the same home with a friend, we cannot discern in him the traces of time's changing hand. These changes are so minute, so slow, so gradual, as to elude the joint efforts of memory and observation to detect them. But, on return to that friend after a year's absence, we should see all these changes in the aggregate: we should at once recognize his altered appearance.

And so, if the Christian be only most earnest in his work of self-examination each day, and seek, through God's Grace, to have changes for the better effected in his character and conduct, he may compare his present state with that some time before, and may have his eyes opened to the discovery that in manners, habits, prepos-

sessions, temper, he is not the same man as formerly. He has repeatedly listened to the calls of Conscience, and has sought to carry out its dictates into practice, and this will be the result. This is that "growth" more and more "into Christ," that, "coming unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the Stature of the Fulness of Christ," of which the apostle speaks ;—that "renewal of the inward man, day by day, while the outward man decays."

It has been well recommended, that they who, through God's Grace, have, throughout the year, been earnest and constant in *daily* self-examination, should, over and above this exercise during Lent, concentrate all the energy they can upon the subdual of some one strong sin, which they may know has had more or less mastery of them for years. The heart, intent upon this, will be able, through fasting, and watchfulness, and prayer, to learn more of the secret workings of that sin than it has known before. It has for a long time, it may be,

worked its way in the heart as the mole underground; secretly sapping the strength of weaker graces, and striving to weaken the stronger ones also; infecting thoughts, words, works, and imagination, with its subtle poison, so that, with the view of arresting its progress, the Christian must anticipate its movements, and strive to see the course it takes, as shown by such parts of his inner life as he will perceive to be tainted with it.

And Lent, again, is a season for solemn review of our life, taken as a whole. As far back as the strength of our memory's vision will carry us, we should seek to look, so as to take in the distinguishing traits of our characters in past years, even the earliest. Such retrospection will be often associated with memories dark and bright, of God's Dealings towards us. We shall behold mercies innumerable scattered everywhere over the ground traversed. We shall behold just judgments visited upon us for long indulgence in sins, Providential rescues

from death when we were living at enmity with God, deliverances from imminent dangers of many kinds, unexpected helps in seasons of trouble. We shall recollect, too, periods when religious impressions seemed to be deepening in our souls, when we were trying to strike more and more closely into the narrow way. And how blessed will it be for us, if this more general retrospection and self-examination enables us to see, that, in some traits of our disposition, we seem to be better than formerly:—that we are not so impetuous, so prone to fits of anger, so resentful as we were:—that we have “learned Christ” better, and that, in the silent lapse of years, He has become more Precious to us.

Some may deny, that the Christian has the power of recalling things so far back as this. But such must be surely forgetful of the Omnipotent Helper who works within him. Only let the pious Christian hallow these forty days before Easter by some

such holy and secret exercises as have been pointed out. He may feel his powers are feeble, at the beginning, but, at the close, if God spare his life, he shall find himself the possessor of spiritual strength he never knew before. This is the earnest heart-work of love—work which God looks for at our hands:—and, if we do not render it, we are too much like that fig-tree in the Gospel, which, in judgment, was withered away. We may, indeed, have leaves of mere professions, good resolutions, promises, and words, but surely this will not satisfy The Judge.

Again, then, once more: let the Christian be careful to enter upon his holy employment in the spirit of love for his Lord, and with a single eye to His Glory, in striving to offer himself as “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is his reasonable service.” Let him not, for this love’s sake, be thoughtless and mirthful, while his Saviour fasted and wept. Let not, indeed, his fast be seen or suspected

by others, and let him fast and pray for the sake of pure *obedience*, lest he be ensnared into the idea that merit is attached to it. So shall he “know Christ, and the Power of His Resurrection, and the fellowship of His Sufferings.” And so will the Sun of Easter burst in upon his soul with inexpressibly more warmth and radiance—the faint type of that Everlasting Sun of Righteousness who shall thenceforth arise upon His servant with fresh “Healing in His Wings,” and Who, if he be preserved faithful even unto death, shall be his Light, and Life, and Joy in the streets of the New Jerusalem.

The eves of the greater Christian Festivals—Christmas, Easter, Ascension-Day, Whitsunday—offer much ground for Self-Examination of a more special kind as to the heart’s progress or declension in the graces most prominently inculcated by the doctrines of each. In proportion to our growth in humility, will be the fervour of our spirit’s adoration of God made Man. If it please God to show us,

as we kneel down in our solemn duty on Easter-even, at the Foot of the Throne, that He has been of late working within us a deadness towards the world and worldly things, and a reviving love of holiness, the Morning of the Saviour's commemorated Resurrection will suggest to us thrilling foretastes of our own. All troubles and anxieties will lose their power to depress; dark fears of the grave will appear to us more and more groundless, the end of life will seem to be bathed in glorious light, in proportion as the soul, through the attainment of heavenly-mindedness, learns to look forward hopefully and joyfully to its emancipation from sin, sorrow, and death.

And, further than this, the pious Christian would find it most profitable, on the eve of each Ascension-Day, to test his inner life, as to his calm contentment with his present lot, that he may discover whether he has been too much pressed down earthward by his cares; or has received grace, as he

believes "the Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended into the heavens, so, also, in heart and mind thither to ascend, and with Him continually to dwell." And what employment, on the eve of Whit-Sunday, could be more blessed than that of searching into his spirit, that he may know to what sins he is yet prone, that cause him to grieve the Holy Comforter, and create within him spiritual discomfort and sterility? He may seek to review all the more memorable pleadings with him of the Holy Spirit, and to ascertain if he has not been only half-awake to those Blessed Calls, and very slow in obedience to them, although he may not have suspected this when he received them.

Spiritual earnestness and fervour will suggest to his mind many pointed questions on these several subjects, and, in his spirit, he will realise that blessedness resulting from conscious growth in grace which it would be vain to attempt to describe. Only let him struggle, in all prayerfulness, for inward proofs that he is

walking, firmly and in all stedfastness, along the heavenward road. This he may know if he can discover, in his heart, a certain appetite or craving after Celestial Grace, corresponding *at all* in eagerness to that with which the soul's grosser consort aims at the attainment of its pleasures. The soul may learn a salutary lesson from mere earthly desires, in this respect. It may thus be urged on to rise out of the colder, less heavenly region of mere spiritual obedience into the warmer one of holy love, in whose upper air it will, upheld by The Spirit, seek ever to remain, above the reach, as far as may be, of earthly pursuits and longings.

CHAPTER IV.

OF SELF-EXAMINATION BEFORE HOLY COMMUNION.

OF all seasons set apart for the soul's solemn self-examination, that which precedes the reception of this Holy Sacrament will surely be allowed by all to hold the highest, the most important place. "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup." Participation in these Holy Mysteries is the highest act of faith the Christian can offer to his God. At no time, during his continuance in the flesh, ought he to feel himself nearer to God; and, therefore, never should he be more prepared to stand in the Divine Presence.

And yet, how low and unworthy of their Christian name is the motive which draws many to that Holy Table! How many draw near, as a matter of mere routine, only on certain greater occasions in the year, deluding themselves, perhaps, into the idea that such cold and formal observances will atone for their neglect of religious duties in other respects, and at other times! And it is fearful to know that among such recipients of the Holy and Heavenly Feast are too often to be seen the worldly, the sensual, the profane—those who after, perhaps, less than a single evening's questioning of themselves, or even without any previous preparation, will leave the world for a moment, as it were, to perform an unreal act of solemn mockery in the Sight of God. For what else can such reception of the Sacrament be but this, when he who verbally, from the moment of his kneeling before his God to partake of it, dedicates himself thenceforth anew, soul and body, to his Maker's service, so often is

scious of much that is unholy in his dealings with others, and even purposes returning to the same sinful course when the Sabbath is over?

How many present themselves among the Communicants, who, so far from having kept up a custom of close daily self-examination, do not even devote more time to preparation for the Sacred Feast than is sufficient to add a few words to their usual prayers, or to read a chapter, it may be, the evening before! How many come who feel the very fetters of some besetting sin yet hanging about them — not pressing them so closely at the time, but which they know will yet again bring them into bondage — a bondage they make few, if any, efforts to throw off.

And even of those Communicants whose characters, as to their dealings with the world, and as to mere moral rectitude, will bear closer scrutiny, how many are there who, notwithstanding their punctual attention to the outward

performance of all religious duties, and their wonted staid and reverent demeanour in the moments set apart for the administration, have really never known a single thrill of heart-felt love to God, have never sincerely repented of their past sins, have, practically, but little knowledge of the walk by faith, are Pharisaical in many of their notions about sacred things, give little of their substance in support of the promulgation of the Gospel among the heathen, or if they give somewhat liberally in proportion to their neighbours, make it a matter of secret self-satisfaction—knowing all the time they have exercised, as to their offering, no self-denial at all !

So varied are the motives that actuate those who approach this Memorial of Calvary ! Custom, regard to the smiles of powerful friends, worldly interest, false notions regarding its efficacy as separate from faithful and penitent reception of it—these bring men to the celebration of the Redeemer's Dying Love—these lead them

to obey that command, "Do this, in remembrance of Me."

It is true that there is no such thing—strictly speaking—as *fitness* for the reception of the Holy Communion. "How can a clean thing come out of an unclean? Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" It is true, that the ministers of Christ act rightly when they press all who labour under a deep sense of sin, and long for release from it, *not* to delay their approach to Christ. They may have no other opportunity, and the time when true penitence is working within them, through the Holy Spirit's In-dwelling, when good resolutions have been secretly formed, and a life of holy love and obedience aimed at for the future, is one most acceptable in the Sight of God. But why should they come who have no preparedness of heart, no hatred of sin, no earnest penitence, no working faith, no love that would fain soar into heavenly heights, no thirst after God? These feelings clothe the spirit in the suitable

garment for kneeling down to receive so Heavenly a Banquet.

Much more might be written of this Holy Sacrament, and of the various characters of its recipients ; but the present manual keeps in view the needs of one only among the others—those of the earnest Christian. It is hoped the perusal of the few preceding remarks may not have been useless to him, but that they may have a tendency to lead him to closer inspection of his own heart, so that he too may see if there be any wicked way in him, any feeling contrary to the Spirit of Christ, that disqualifies him for deriving the benefit he desires from the Memorial of his Saviour's Death. In the hope, then, that he may be able to see, with the greater ease, what should be the subjects of self-examination before the Holy Communion, a few leading questions are appended—to which he should add others, as individual propensities or better self-knowledge may suggest them.

And let not this self-scrutiny be hurrie

or compressed into the space of a single evening. During, at least, the week previous to the celebration of the holy rite, let him put the enquiries, again and again, to his heart, and test the uniformity, the consistency, the truthful sincerity of that heart's replies. Very little with the world, very much in secret with God, let him be during the period set apart for preparation. Let the fountains of Divine Wisdom be more than before resorted to: let him bring his soul much before the piercing Eye of God's Word; let him pray without ceasing, and be more than usually vigilant, both before and after his reception of the Sacred Feast—remembering those deeply solemn Words of his Lord,* “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, ‘I will return unto my house whence I came out.’ And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he and taketh to him seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and

* St. Luke xi. 24, 25, 26.

they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first."

1. What is my motive for wishing to receive the Holy Communion? Is it one of at least doubtful propriety?

2. Am I living in the indulgence of any known sin?

3. Do I "resist, even unto blood, fighting against sin?"

4. Have I yet within me any remaining affection for sin,—and if so, for what sin?

5. Can I think of the probability of my falling again into sin without pain and grief? Or have I been in the habit of excusing any of my transgressions on the score of human frailty?

6. Am I prone to sinful excess, even in allowable things?

7. Am I sufficiently guarded against hypocrisy?

8. Am I anxious in watching my thoughts, and do I grieve when they wander?

9. Have I felt myself, through God's suppli-

cated Help, stronger of late in resisting temptation?

10. Am I consciously intending to carry out any purpose after reception of the Holy Sacrament, of which my Lord would disapprove?

11. Am I prone to think well of myself for perseverance in the pursuit of spiritual gifts and graces? Do I struggle sufficiently against self-righteousness?

12. Have I any regard to the praise of men in my actions?

13. Does my *life* pray, as well as my lips?

14. Do I ever defer religious duties, in consideration of any vain, or even plausible, but insufficiently-considered excuse?

15. Is there any one towards whom I have a secret or avowed animosity,—and, if so, am I ready to seek reconciliation with that person?

16. Have I made restitution and satisfaction, to the utmost of my powers, for all injuries and wrongs done by me to others?

17. Am I true and just in all my dealings?

18. Do I feel the urgent spiritual necessity of coming to this Holy Sacrament?

19. What evidences are there in my daily life, of the working of that heavenly love to Christ which should draw me to it?

20. Do I in all earnest, truthful sincerity give my first and best affections to God, so that I can say and feel, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee"?

21. Do I long, above all things, for proofs of Christ's ever-indwelling Presence in my soul? Is my constant aspiration—

"Abide with me from morn till eve,
For without Thee I cannot live:
Abide with me when night is nigh,
For without Thee I *dare* not die."

22. Is my faith strong enough to lead me, at this moment, to give up even life for my Lord, did He require it of me?

23. Do I *covet* the possession of all spiritual blessings in the Lord Jesus Christ?

24. Could I feel happy and contented with Christ as my Portion, were life in the truest sense, a wilderness to me?

25. Do I hunger and thirst after God?

26. "Am I in trouble till I converse with my Lord in all the ways of spiritual intercourse?"

27. Do I struggle to keep my faith above all mists of unbelief?

28. Have I caught myself murmuring, or discontented with any of God's Dispensations towards me?

29. Do I love my brother-man as Christ would have me to love him; not as a matter of sentiment only, but as one earnestly seeking his happiness, and ever prepared to submit to self-sacrifice that I may promote it?

30. Does any love of money, or unnecessary thriftiness, check the course of Christian liberality; or am I profuse in expenditure upon myself or my family, to the hindrance of testifying secretly my love for Christ and the souls He died to save?

31. "Do I rejoice when a Communion Day comes?"

32. When was I last lukewarm with regard to the Holy Sacrament?

33. Have I ever felt any kind of sweetness in the worthy receiving of the Holy Communion, such as no other sacred ordinance could give me?

34. "Do I come to the springs of salvation as the hart to the water-brooks, panting and thirsty, longing and passionate, weary of sin, and hating vanity, and reaching out the heart and hands to Christ? Do I seek to drink of the Waters of the Spiritual Rock as eagerly as the Israelites drank of the stricken rock in the wilderness, 'which Rock was Christ?'"

With reference to the Christian soul's desires in participating of the Holy Communion, Bishop Jeremy Taylor powerfully and aptly says—"Now let us, by the aids of memory and fancy, consider the children of Israel in the wilderness, in a barren and dry land, where no

water was, march in dust and fire, not wet with the dew of Heaven, wholly without moisture, save only what dropt from their own brows ; the air was fire, and the vermin was fire ; the flying serpents were of the same cognation with the firmament ; their sting was a flame ; their venom was a fever, and the fever a calenture, and their whole state of abode and travel was a little image of the Day of Judgment, when the elements shall melt with fervent heat : these men, like salamanders, walking in fire, dry with heat, and scorched with thirst, and made yet more thirsty by calling upon God for water : suppose, I say, these thirsty souls, hearing Moses to promise that he will smite the rock, and that a river should break forth from thence, observe how presently they ran to the foot of the springing stone, thrusting forth their heads and tongues to meet the water, impatient of delay, crying out that the water did not move like light, all at once ; and then, suppose the pleasure of their drink, the unsatiableness of

their desire, the immensity of their appetite; they took in as much as they could, and they desired much more. This was their Sacrament of the same Mystery, and this was their manner of receiving it, and this teaches us to come to the same Christ with the same desires. For if that water was a type of our Sacrament, or a Sacrament of the same secret blessing, then that thirst is a signification of our duty, that we come to receive Christ in all the ways of reception with longing appetites, preferring Him before all the interests of the world, as birds do corn above jewels, or hungry men meat before long orations.”*

* Taylor's Worthy Communicant, chap. ii., sect. ii.



CHAPTER V.

OF SELF-EXAMINATION CONNECTED WITH THE VICISSITUDES OF LIFE.

THE true Christian is one to whom the word "fortune" or "chance" should be as an unmeaning sound. He should discern the ever-watchful Providence of God in the most unimportant incidents that befall him every day. Like the starry orbs in the firmament, these daily Providences "utter no real voice nor sound," but they speak in a language of their own, to hearts prepared to receive their message. Multitudes do not care to make use of this close observation; they regard, perhaps, as a mere chimæra of the imagination, the doctrine that our Creator speaks to His crea-

tures again and again in His Dispensations towards them, whether in love or in anger. And until their eyes are Divinely opened to see more of the secrets of God imparted to them that fear Him, until they have received the preparation imparted by the Holy Spirit to all who ask it of Him, their mistake will be persevered in.

Human life is, as it were, a chapter full of Divine Utterances to the soul; deep spiritual meanings lie concealed under all that happens to us. Each more prominent Dispensation of God's Good Providence is, as it were, a parable, having within it profitable instruction, of which true believers alone know how to make useful application. Remember, then, that though in these days there is no open vision, no possibility of conversing face to face with those who are yet moving to and fro in the earth on errands of mercy to our race, God adopts what we call ordinary events as channels of His Messages to man. The eye of Faith is much

dimmer than it ought to be, if Christians are not on the watch for these constantly recurring tokens of their Heavenly Father's care for their soul's eternal peace.

Take the assertion in the Word of God, that the angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." Take, again, those emphatic words of the Psalmist, "How precious, also, are Thy Thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with Thee." And, once more, take the assurances of Holy Writ conveyed in that striking passage in the Book of Job—a passage, like the other two, applicable to all men in all ages of the world—"God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed then He openeth the ears of men, and

sealeth their instruction, that He may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword."

Can such language as this have no pointed meanings? Is it that of mere poetical exaggeration? O no! Since the angels are "ministering spirits," let us try sometimes if we cannot hear their sweet, thin low voices. Listen we for their accents in periods of sorrow, perplexity, bereavement, or illness. We shall hear them if our hearts are *prepared* so to do. And since the Thoughts of God towards His creatures are so numberless, we may naturally look for their expression in some language peculiarly Divine. The Thoughts of God are linked with the Sleepless Activity of His Power, His Wisdom, and His Love: they are Thoughts borne out into Action. Would they, then, not stream into the Dispensations of His Providence, and give to them a certain language in the ears of His faithful servants?

In all heart-burnings, and rebukes of Conscience, and bitter remembrances after sin, we may surely read expressed the Thoughts of God. Let us ponder this well. It is a truth set before us in Holy Scripture ; and, as such, ought to lead us more than ever to feel a constantly vivid and awe-inspiring sense of the Divine Omniscience and Omnipresence. Let the attitude of our souls henceforth be that of watchful attention, and their appeal to the Most High,—“Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.” For if, amidst the whirl and din of earthly cares, those mysterious Voices are lost upon us, it is no wonder that we grieve so often the Holy Spirit of God. We may find, hereafter, if we may say so reverently, that our excuses for persisting in any course of action contrary to God’s good pleasure will be met by the question proceeding from the centre of the Great White Throne—“Didst thou not hear My Voice in that matter?”

I believe, then, that the incidents of our

daily life are as vessels full of God's Instructions and Warnings; — that, in all *truthful reality*, He speaks to us in each, though we have most frequently to look below the surface of each for His Meaning. And the true Christian cannot profess his faith in these things without admitting that, as his experiences of life have been and still are so many and various, so, being connected with the Living, Working, and Speaking Thoughts of God in his behalf, they must of necessity contain within them much grave matter for close self-examination. God has the good of His creatures in view when He condescends so mysteriously to address and to teach them their duty. HE adapts His Messages, so conveyed, to the soul's prevalent dangers, wants, and desires. Only, therefore, the most slothful Christian, whose faith is weak and low, could reasonably be expected to go on through his life firm to one purpose, and without need to ascertain what it is, to which his wishes he should be attentive.

Trouble, disease, and death have ravaged this fair creation, because of sin. Each comes to us now in the character of an avenger of sin. Such is the point and meaning evident in that wise address to the sick—"Dearly beloved, know this, that Almighty God is the Lord of life and death, and of all things to them pertaining, as youth, strength, health, age, weakness, and sickness. Wherefore, whatsoever your sickness is, know you certainly, that it is God's visitation. And for what cause soever this sickness is sent unto you ; whether it be to try your patience for the example of others, and that your faith may be found in the day of the Lord laudable, glorious, and honourable, to the increase of glory and endless felicity ; or else it be sent unto you to correct and amend in you whatsoever doth offend the Eyes of your Heavenly Father," &c., "it shall turn to your profit, and help you forward in the right way that leadeth unto everlasting life."

And how often do chastisements peculiarly

adapt themselves to the nature of the sin committed, so as to place the knowledge of the true offence meant to be thus rebuked beyond all doubt! In certain cases, our consciences find no difficulty whatever in tracing the link between the punishment and the very sin for which it is visited upon us. Though months may elapse between the sin and its punishment, and, as the heathen poet graphically expresses it, "Punishment has seldom omitted to follow up, though with lame foot, the sinner walking on before her," yet the sin thus visited comes again before us as vividly as if it had been committed only yesterday. But this is not uniformly so. We may often feel disposed to repine at the Divine Judgments, as though we considered ourselves ill-used, unjustly treated by them. We are unable at the moment to think of that particular stain upon our past or passing life which has brought the angry messenger from heaven to our hearth. But is never there without just cause.

"Thoughts" of God have sent it to us, and its purpose will not have been accomplished until it has drawn us into retirement, where, with the pages of the past opened before us, we shall, if we search faithfully with the aid of "The Spirit Who searcheth all things," soon ascertain and humbly recognise its mission.

Let, then, the earnest-hearted Christian lay it down as a rule, admitting of no exceptions, that, in all cases of adversity, bitter disappointment, sickness, losses, and bereavement, and in those, too, of deferred answers to prayer, a minister of his angry or grieved Creator is within his home. And let him at once rise, take this minister with him into his closet, and there give it solemn audience. And the practice, too, of searching self-examination at such seasons will tend greatly to reveal to him how narrowly his very thoughts are known to the Almighty and Omniscient Ruler of the universe. He will learn thereby that nothing can escape His Detection, and will surely be urged

on to observe himself in future more closely. These reflections, too, will have another happy and edifying effect upon him. They will teach him to see more and more vividly, that, although countless millions may be scattered over the surface of the globe, the Eye of God is yet upon him personally;—that his truest comfort is yet Divinely cared for, his character watched and moulded, from day to day; that “he is not his own, but bought with A Price,”—a creature whom God has the Will and the Power “to guide here by His Counsel,” and “afterward to receive to Glory.”

And yet, once more: these closet-exercises will often serve to show the relationship subsisting between any particular course of action, and an exigency following it—though the then coming exigency may not have been known or foreseen at the time such actions were determined upon. Thus is it that God works for His noble creature man, to benefit and to bless him, through the agency of that creature himself.

He suffers the exigency to come ; but, before its arrival, prompts to certain efforts which will provide an antidote to its ills. Let these things also be carefully looked into, that the soul may thereby be drawn more and more closely to God, in all humble adoration and fervent love. Thus may the truth, so little felt now, of the psalmist's assurance, obtain gradual realization in the case of the pious believer.—“The Secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His Covenant.”

CHAPTER VI.

AIDS TO SELF-EXAMINATION.

As the process by which we arrive at self-knowledge is deeply spiritual in its nature, we must look far more for spiritual than material helps in carrying it on. It has difficulties, springing more from the constitution of the human heart and mind, than from Self-examination itself; and so it is not to be expected that he can satisfactorily conduct it, who seeks the main assistance, which will enable him to do this, from sources lower than Divine.

The fact that self-examination possesses difficulties at all, or that Christians seek aid in

conducting it, more or less forcibly proves that the importance of the great realities to which it relates, the favour of God and the salvation of the soul, and the attainment, through grace and perseverance in well-doing, of a place in the heavenly dignities hereafter, is not sufficiently impressed upon the heart. Men who test their actions with reference to any past transaction, through connection with which they think they may have endangered their respectability, or good moral fame, in the eyes of their fellow creatures, ask little for help in the conduct of the scrutiny. In their keen sensitiveness as to their imperilled honour, they see all they seek after in the shortest possible light. This gives them perseverance, close insight, jealous care : if weariness at all overtake them it is most frequently the re-action alone of their diligence—coming upon them when the ordeal is over.

But, with reference to man's eternal destiny, so subtle, sleeplessly active, and powerful are the evil agencies leagued against his peace, that his

very strongest impressions as to Divine Truths are apt to become weakened, and his faith to be occasionally overclouded. Then it is that he will feel unable to cope with the difficulties of self-examination. A sense of weariness, wanderings from the end he seeks to keep in view; and cravings after strong assurances of personal safety will prompt him to seek for that aid which shall help him, through God's Grace, to concentrate his flagging energies upon the work before him, or to reduce in it those difficulties which he finds it hard to overcome.

It would, perhaps, be well, before suggesting such aids to the true Christian as his necessities require, to draw his attention to the two following truths, which, if they carry with them their due weight and influence, are in themselves very suggestive of the particular help he stands in need of. These are—*that self-examination has reference to the eternal state, and that it is generally indispensable to salvation*—at least, in ordinary cases.

These considerations stamp it with a worth, a dignity, an importance, which ought at once to attract and hold to it the soul possessing faith, and anxious for holiness, with no less powerful a magnet than that which draws a man to the endurance of hardship and much self-denial, in order that his character, as to some mere worldly matter, may stand out fair and upright in the eyes of his neighbours. It is no mere duty to be performed for its own sake: it is a subordinate means of Grace, on the right conduct of which, and on the due pursuit of the path it marks out, eternal happiness depends. If these considerations fail to hold the heart to its work of self-scrutiny, it is vain to suggest aids at all. But let them be kept ever in view—let the Christian learn so to value them, as that he would as soon think of self-banishment from his fellow beings altogether, as of neglecting the duty to which they would lead him, and his very earnestness to be saved will make him prompt and eager in the

search after such aids as shall assist him in the working out of that to which salvation is so closely linked.

There is a lax religion in our Christian land, which seems to call for some such statement as that contained in the second consideration given above. Men hope for such great and glorious things hereafter, while so little prayer, so little meditation on God's Holy Word, so little faith and love of Christ content them here. They live, even while uttering holy hopes with their lips, as though confession of sin were only a form of words requiring no active vigilance to render it particular: as though it were the easiest and most comfortable, as well as the safest thing possible to "float and sway" between service to God and service to the world—betaking themselves to one when tired of the other.

And this necessarily prompts such to neglect self-examination. Faith they like to think of and to possess, and here and there they

can find a very little time to read their Bibles ; they perhaps are punctual in the performance of their brief and hurried devotions : and thus remain satisfied that their prospects of heaven are bright and promising. But where is the heart of religion ? Where is love ? This feeling would *drive* them to self-scrutiny. They anger God again and again, but heed it not, because they have little, if any, love for Him. Their thoughts about salvation are selfish ; and because the grand principle of spiritual life is wanting, its pulses flow most indolently. Many would awake to find all such hopes a dream, could it be impressed upon them that God asks of His creatures more than this : that He has said not only "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," but "*Examine yourselves* whether ye be in the faith : *prove your own selves.*" The assertion I have made, that self-examination is generally necessary to salvation, may be a startling one, but it is put forth in all sober conviction as to its entire truth. It may be asked,

“What time had the dying thief to think over his past sins? and yet he was pardoned.” I have two replies to make to this: first, that it is most probable the work of *general*, though not of particular, self-scrutiny was crowded into the space of his last dying moments, as his own confession to the other malefactor seems to show—“We, indeed, justly: for we receive the due reward of our deeds:” and secondly, that the case of the dying thief is one which hardly occurs once in ten thousand instances of God’s forgiveness of sinners.

Yet, partly because, even in earnest natures, these two considerations are apt to lose much of their first power through the ceaseless activities of evil opposition, and partly because, even to those who strain after the more excellent way, a few brief suggestions may be welcome, it will be well to give them here. The objects most contemplated by this aid should be the attainment of that serious frame of mind required for profitable engagement in self-examination, since

in a previous chapter on the difficulties of the exercise itself, such brief hints have been given as may, through God's blessing, in some measure obviate them.

And first: let the true Christian, before he commence his work, never fail to invoke the *Aid of the Spirit* "*Who searcheth all things, even the Deep Things of God.*" It is He who *within* us, and for us, offers up the acceptable prayer, and it is He "who trieth the very hearts and reins of man:"—"Who is a Discerner, in a yet higher sense than the Written Word, of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Without this invocation, self-scrutiny will prove a cold, barren, unprofitable exercise—taking up time for no good end. The heart must be kept acutely alive to the importance of this, and the prayer for His Gracious Help must be no mere matter of form, but must spring from deep consciousness of the immense importance of the work about to be engaged in, and from the in-dwelling conviction that it cannot be carried on at all without that

Divine Assistance. The whole work, indeed, will be only, as it were, an offering placed in readiness upon the altar, but upon which no fire from Heaven will descend, which will, indeed, incur the danger of being plucked thence by evil birds of prey as long as the heart fails to supplicate for the Descent of the Spirit upon its sacred employment.

And, again: let the believer, before he commences his work, seek *to realise, to bring home to himself the truth of the Omniscience and Omnipotence of God.* The thoughts will often be wayward and rebellious, when the Christian is even more than usually anxious to concentrate them upon the one subject before him, and the frustration of his endeavours to hold them in check will be a burden, a disappointment heavy to bear. But no better resolve could possibly be put into practice in such moments than that of the Psalmist—"When I am in heaviness, I will think upon God; when my heart is vexed, I will complain." Let

the believer throw himself open, for a few moments, to the guidance of such heavenly musings as will often stream into the soul like blessed visions of the "Better Land," so plentifully as to baffle all power of expression.

Meditation does not necessarily require the aid of words, whether mentally present only, or expressed in a low fervent tone. There is a deep, still silence, full of heavenly warmth and sweetness, which holds, as it were, the kneeling worshipper in a trance, and raises him up to *look at* things Divine. Most of us can tell how we were affected, as we gazed upon a beautiful painting that brought forcibly before us some sacred subject. Our thoughts were too deep for words : we felt as those fearful of being disturbed from our reverie, we gazed till our whole being seemed absorbed in the contemplation of the object before us. So, too, it is with many who have viewed lovely scenery, or have listened to the hoarse music of the waves breaking upon the beach ; and yet no one will say that in the depth

of those musings we could ever discern a sequence or train of words and ideas, mentally visible, which gave shape and form to the heart's feelings of admiration, pity, or delight. Still less would any one deny to such moods the name of meditation.

I would impress this point upon the reader's mind, because he may be one of those, who, when urged to meditate upon things holy, reply they cannot do so. They take a text or a sacred subject into retirement, but because they can find *no words* at hand wherein to clothe and arrange, in due order, the confused ideas that then come up before their minds, they become dispirited and discouraged. Such disappointments become stumbling-blocks in the way of the pious believer. But let him try to think differently on this point. Before he begins the review of his past hours, let him kneel down in perfect rest from all attempts to toil after the acquisition of mental language. Let him, each time, one of the texts given in the

dix, bearing upon the Omniscience and Omnipresence of God, or upon the important exercise in which he is about to be engaged; and, keeping them in his memory, throw open the flood-gates of his heart and mind to the influx of holy feeling, which God will assuredly give him. So may he obtain the serious mood of heart in which he should enter upon self-examination.

A tendency of the mind to the habit of that moderately grave and staid thoughtfulness, which can yet consist with Christian cheerfulness, will keep the pious heart prepared for its work of self-scrutiny. There is a sober, contented gravity—distant alike from levity and gloom—which is full of cheerfulness, such as is natural to the soul sensible of its sins having been pardoned. The gloomy believer is one who has very mistaken views as to the influence meant to be exercised over the human race by the Gospel. The spirit of the Apostle could not have been burdened with a settled melancholy when he caused those words to be

written—"I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." A holy cheerfulness seems to run throughout his language, the cheerfulness as of a man returning home after a long absence and perilous adventures.

And even the proverbial uncertainty of life was surely never intended by Almighty God to chase away the smiles of Christian happiness from the countenance. If it were so, what is to be said of those joyful exclamations that so distinguish the spirit of the Psalmist? They who employ themselves "in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord," cannot do this in a sullen, moody, discontented frame of mind. It is to impenitent sinners, and the "double-minded," those of unsteady aim in life, that St. James writes—"Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness." And the Redeemer thus rebuked the thoughtless indifference to His holy

doctrines of stiff-necked and rebellious Israel—"Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep"—in almost the same breath as when speaking, figuratively perhaps, of those who should obey Him, he said—"Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh." Laughter, excited by that which militates against the religion of the Lord Jesus, is as the "crackling of thorns under a pot"—of momentary continuance, as it were, and provocative of retribution. But the Christian, assured of Divine Pardon, and of seeing his Saviour, Face to face, in endless bliss, if he be kept from falling to the end of his life, should, in all cases, obey the dictates of his conscience, and abstain from giving way to worldly levity, such as cannot fail to render him unfit for all solemn exercises, —while he may yet be uniformly happy, contented, and cheerful, in his conversation and deportment.

Fasting, before the more solemn periods of self-examination, wherever constitutional

strength or the state of health permit it to be used, will be found a valuable help to the attainment of a devotional spirit. Only let it never be resorted to as though it were meritorious in the sight of God. The Saviour inculcated and used it: and with reference to the expulsion of the evil spirit from that demoniac who was brought for cure to the nine apostles, while He, with the three favoured ones, were yet on the Mount of Transfiguration, He observed, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." And it is universally acknowledged, that there is a close resemblance between this particular case of possession, and sins of impurity, which are apt to exercise dominion in the human soul.

Whether our Blessed Lord condescended to fast as Perfect Man, and, as One sharing all the infirmities of our nature, and recognising it as an aid to prayer, or whether He, the Perfectly Sinless One, fasted that He might teach us the same duty, we will not too curiously enquire;

but as there seems nothing irreverent in the first supposition, so the second would seem to point out one true reason, at least, of His submitting to long and painful fasts.

Holy men, characters brought before us in the Old and New Testaments, employed this aid largely, with the view of augmenting or sustaining the devotional spirit. And if any human aid, more than another sanctioned and recommended by our Lord, Who also annexed a glorious promise to His recommendation that it should be employed, has the power of causing sincere Christians to feel all that is meant by that phrase of Holy Scripture—"Being in the Spirit"—it is surely that of fasting. For it has a tendency to uplift the soul, for the time, from the influences of the corruptible body, which are so antagonistic to devotion: it helps to hush the clamorous voices of earthly appetites and passions, or to lay them, as it were, to sleep, which will intrude upon us in the midst of the most sacred employments. It gives elasticity

and freedom to our spiritual part, and imparts an earnest of that eternal calm of the redeemed spirit, when, safely at home in the heavenly city, it shall know no more of "the body of this death," that so checked its holy love and prayerfulness in the probationary state. In proportion, therefore, to the true Christian's energetic struggles after heavenly-mindedness, will be his determination, with God's help, to use all aids calculated to promote it, and among these, it will easily be seen that fasting occupies by no means the lowest place.

All Christians seeking to hold communion with their past hours, would naturally seek retirement for the purpose, and it appears needless to insist upon this as an aid here; the more so, as in an earlier chapter a remedy has been suggested for the want of it. Hints have also been given as to the government of unruly thoughts, and the strengthening of the memory, by using all possible means of concentrating its powers on the thoughts, words, and works of

the day. It remains only to commend to the reader's thoughtful consideration, the aids more especially dwelt upon in the present chapter. Being spiritual in their nature, they are such as only the earnest-hearted Christian would be likely to think well of and adopt. A loving and vigorous faith, a tender conscience, real hungering and thirsting after God, will at once seek to "under-set" themselves with all Celestial gifts the Spirit offers to bestow. They will seek to receive strength sufficient for the performance of all holy duties, from the One Well of Salvation, and, as by instinct, will pass by those "broken cisterns" of merely human aid, "which can hold no water."

CHAPTER VII.

DUTIES SUBSEQUENT TO SELF-EXAMINATION.

WHEN the true Christian has quitted the scene of his self-enquiry, he must not give up all further thought or care about the matter. He has been engaged in the performance, not of a duty only, but of a positive necessity—a necessity to his well-being as a lover of God, and a responsible creature.

Self-examination is not the end, the climax of Christian duty: it is the soul's resting-place, where she stays for a little while to measure, as far as she may, the distance in the heavenward-road she has recently travelled, to count over perils past, and to look narrowly into the nature of each, that

she may be prepared to avoid those to come. Many souls pass by this resting-place altogether. They hurry incautiously forward, or strike into other by-paths as fancy and inclination lead them :—the road *appears* to them the right one, as far as the little notice they take of it gives them the power of judging; and so, not perhaps till many years have elapsed, the discovery is made that they have taken the wrong course, and need to retrace their steps, when there is little if any opportunity for them to do so. But the earnest Christian, having gained his experience, must seek to profit by it if he would go on to the end rejoicing; and there are duties, subsequent to self-examination, to be pointed out to him, if that solemn exercise is to preserve its value as a means of grace, and not to sink into a lifeless and unprofitable form, divorced from the end to which it relates — that of individual, personal salvation.

The first duty to be thought of after having

proved ourselves sinners, is *to repent of that in which we have offended*. Let the Christian be careful to notice *what kind of repentance* succeeds to self-conviction. The evil one, who is near continually, will use his utmost art in endeavouring either to substitute feigned or counterfeit for genuine repentance, or to infuse into the confession expressive of real penitence, a spirit contradictory of the words.

It is, indeed, only what we should all be prepared to expect, that this arch-deceiver should lie in wait for the soul while treading the path of nearest approach to God, since he is aware that our Creator regards not the language, but the spirit of our devotions, and knows that even the most watchful Christians may so often be taken off their guard. Has he not often caused us to feel, even when we deemed ourselves truly sorry for our sins, a spirit working underneath our confessions which may be expressed thus:—“I have caught myself wandering again from God :

but how can I help it? My sinful propensities are a part of my very nature; and it is hard I should be expected to do right, when my Creator wills that I should be possessed of such strong propensities to do wrong."

Alas! these are some of the "evil thoughts and blasphemies" that so haunt the human heart, and pollute its offerings at the Throne of Grace! Let then the true Christian be on the watch against the infusion of this poison into the spring of penitential tears, and let the confession be again and again renewed, rather than that its purpose in promoting reconciliation with God should be so subtly defeated.

Sincere repentance is characterised by the absence of all presumptuous interrogation of God's Purposes and Decrees in our creation. It reasons not, save only on God's side, with the heart's evil ways: loving faith leads it to be acutely sensitive to the guilt it deplores: it seeks to love and to hate

as God loves and hates, and in the consciousness alone that it does this, feels itself safe. It listens to no palliative; its flow is impeded by no vain excuses. It brings the sinner to "The Fountain filled with Blood," in all his vileness, and seeks to magnify The Redeemer's Power and Willingness to save, by detracting, in no respect, from the natural impurity of the soul that wishes to be washed and purified in Calvary's Cleansing Stream. It looks first upon The All-Holy God, and then upon the unholy heart, and simply urges,—“Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight: that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest.” It leads the contrite sinner to mourn and to plead—

“For pleasure I have given my soul;
Now, Justice, let Thy thunders roll;
Now, vengeance smite; and, with a blow
Lay the rebellious ingrate low.

“Yet Jesus, Jesus!—There I'll cling;
I'll crouch beneath His sheltering Wing—
I'll clasp the Cross, and, holding there,
Me, *even me*, His Love may spare.”

Let, then, the Christian wait to ascertain if his repentance be sincere, before he proceeds to the next duty—*that of confession*. Let the *sorrow* be first; then its *acknowledgment*, lest the latter proceed without the former. The objects of confession are—to relieve the heart of its burden of sin—to realize a sense of the Divine Absolution, which is so fully and freely promised to all sincere penitents—to receive courage, and hope, for engagement in the further spiritual warfare awaiting us, and that from the lower steps in the ladder of Christian devotions placed between heaven and earth, the soul may ascend to the highest—that of adoring praise. That Christian is blessed, indeed, whose spirit, in confession, is *really* sad at the thoughts of having offended Him whose Name is Love. And still such tenderness of conscience is very much promoted by the diligent use of self-examination, if love to God be the first motive in carrying it on. Let the reader strain after sensitiveness to this holy grief. So shall he know that in the midst of evil his faith is

steadily increasing, and that The Comforter has taken up His Abode within his breast. And his faith, as it acquires higher and higher stature, shall enable him to feel falling upon his becalmed heart the message of his Heavenly Father's Forgiveness, even as the Touch of the Saviour's Feet upon the waters allayed their tempestuous motion.

How full is Holy Scripture of sweet encouragement and peace for the contrite sinner, confessing the error of his ways—who has *searched* for his sins first, has brought them out of their hiding-places, and has then mourned over each before God in private ! Our Heavenly Father is more than *ready* to hear : He even anticipates the heart-felt confession ; and bestows absolution before the sinner's petition has been finished. So it was that forgiveness came to David, while as yet he had only *resolved* to complain of his guilt : “ I said, I *will confess* my transgressions unto the Lord ; and Thou *forgavest* the iniquity of my sin.” “ It shall come to pass”—is the

Divine Promise through the prophet Isaiah—
“that *before* they call, I will answer; and *while* they are yet speaking, I will hear.” And how beautifully, and with all the force of historical truth, does this eagerness on God’s part to forgive, find exemplification in the case of the prophet Daniel ! What were the words of the angel Gabriel to the kneeling saint? “*At the beginning of thy supplications*, the Commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee ; for thou art greatly beloved.”

Oh, what comfort is there here for those who, strict in self-scrutiny, have little power of utterance in confessing their sins, while yet their hearts may be full of love and penitence ! The prayer of Daniel was offered long after the grace God had sent down to draw it forth had arrived. The prophet had only time to kneel, and to clasp his hands together ; the human spirit had only time to put on the garment suitable for those who present a request in the Audience-Chamber of Heaven. The Al-

mighty had only just been reminded that He is a Covenant-God, rich in mercy; the suppliant had only said, perhaps, "We have sinned," (for this was nearly the first complaint he made in that particular prayer) when the commandment went forth, and Gabriel was summoned to relieve his burdened breast. Surely these are thoughts not lightly to be passed over! Let the reader ponder such passages well; if, after the contrite confession has been made, he cannot readily perceive that his pardon "has been sealed in heaven." Whatever may be the commotion of the feelings within the returning sinner's heart, here is unquestionable proof that our God is ever "more ready to hear, than we are to pray, and wont to give more than either we desire or deserve."

Renewed watchfulness, and especially over weakly defended places in the heart, is another duty which ought to come after self-examination. The warder, who has learned by experience that the enemy has ever advanced against the for

tress, from a direction uniformly the same, and has attacked the same part of it, takes care to look to that post first, that so a stronger muster of guards may be disposed there.

Renewed prayerfulness, more earnest and ardent study of the Scriptures, continual fight against the self-righteous spirit which would make a merit of all holy exercises, and especially, perhaps, of self-examination, are duties which will at once suggest themselves to the true Christian, and need here no recommendation of their claims upon his regard. It will be well, too, that he should avoid, if possible, any scenes of temptation where his "foot may have slipped" before. This has been already urged as a duty in these pages. The believer commits sin when he *tempts* God, by throwing himself wantonly upon a difficulty, that he may again experience the Power that once rescued him from it.

CONCLUSION.

THE reader who has patiently perused this little book will at least have gained from its pages, sufficient to confirm his own deeply-impressed convictions, that life upon earth, to be spent properly, must be one long, hard, conflict against evil. Does his heart faint? The "battle is the Lord's." Loud may be the noise, keen the malice, mighty the onset of our spiritual foes pressing on to the charge, and our own position one apparently defenceless; but, blessed be God, there *can* be no other issue for us than victory in this unequal contest, as long as we "resist even unto blood." There must be no parley, no compromise, no submission on our part. How

terrible for us must be the inevitable result, if the Great Captain of our salvation remove us from the ranks of the Church Militant in moments of weak surrender to His enemies ! But what real ground is there for faintness or dismay ? We know what is in store for the conquerors hereafter. " He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment ; and I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels."

And the requisite strength is not our own. HE will nerve the weak arm, and fire the fainting courage, Who is the Life of His people. " We are more than conquerors through Him That Loved us." Morning by morning, as the Christian, remembering how often he has fallen before, looks forward to the time yet before him with fear and trembling, let him remember that He Who is Omnipotent thus addresses him : " Fear thou not ; for I am with thee : be not dismayed ; for I am thy

God: I will Strengthen thee; yea, I Help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the Right Hand of My Righteousness. Behold all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish." Morning by morning let him go forth in the Strength of the Lord his God; and as he fastens on anew his Christian armour,—"The whole armour of God," that "he may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand," let him put to himself these inspiriting questions: "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "HE that spared not His Own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" "Who shall separate us from the Love of Christ?"

Up, Christian! no sleep, no slumber, no folding of the hands to sleep! Shrink from the battle, and all is lost. Press forward

manfully, and all is gained. The Saviour waits to welcome and to crown thee. Angels wait for the joy of bearing thee up thither unharmed, "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." Thy friends who fell asleep in Jesus, wait for thee, that the ties once severed may be again renewed, there, where are meetings without partings, peace separate from all disquiet, bliss without alloy, praise without weariness, life without death, an endless summer's sabbath bathed in Sunshine, without mist or cloud!

APPENDIX.



APPENDIX

(A).

SEE CHAPTER IV.

CASES may occur in which the powers of memory are so feeble that retention of many sins — especially those of thought, or word — though but a few hours, is impossible. And, in the evening review, attention, though concentrated on the work of self-examination, may grow weary before the particulars of such sins can be recalled. Thus, the retrospect will be left more imperfect than it might otherwise have been.

To obviate this impediment to as close and accurate self-knowledge as human infirmity may be supposed able to arrive at, I would suggest that some memorial of the

circumstances, which the Christian may wish to retain should be entered *at the time of their occurrence* in a book reserved for the purpose.

(B).

SEE CHAPTER VIII.

A few texts suggested for reflection, to serve as guides to the choice of others.

Job ix. 11.

Psa. cxxxix.

Job xxiii. 8, 9.

Prov. xvi. 1.

Job xxxiv. 32.

Jer. xxiii. 24.

Psa. xi. 4.

St. Matt. ix. 4.

Psa. xvii. 3, 5.

St. Matt. xxviii. 20.

Psa. xix. 12, 14.

St. John xiv. 18.

Psa. xviii. 32.

Phil. iv. 5, 13.

Psa. xxvi. 2.

THE END.

